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Gifts and Gift Exchange as Aspects of the Byzantine, Arab, and Related Economies

ANTHONY CUTLER

For Philip Grierson

Despite their ubiquity in Arab, Byzantine, and western chronicles, the part that diplomatic gifts played in medieval economies has been largely overlooked. There are at least two explanations for this neglect. First and most obviously, as we use the sources, we accept the fact that presents of this sort were taken for granted by the authors in question: gifts were a traditional and constitutive part of diplomatic practice and therefore normally touched upon lightly or not at all. To Skylitzes, for instance, writing in the second half of the eleventh century, it was all but a matter of course that Romanos I would load “Saracen” ambassadors to his court with expensive (but unspecified) presents as a way to dissuade al-Mahdī, the Fāṭimid ruler of North Africa, from a projected alliance with Symeon of Bulgaria.¹ Similarly, while Skylitzes’ contemporary, the Andalusian Ibn Ḥayyān, like most Arab historians, provides many more details about the nature of the gifts he reports, the twenty dromedaries, complete with saddles, bridles, and other trappings, and the twenty pregnant camels that Muḥammad b. Jazar, an ally of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III, sent to Cordoba in 930, were no more than the contribution to be expected of a regional leader and implicit testimony to the caliph’s suzerainty.² In the eyes of both Muslim and Byzantine writers, duly followed by their modern successors, the gifts that they mention are incidental and peripheral to the central events of political history that they describe.

A second reason for this omission may be the appropriation of the topic by the social sciences. Filling the vacuum left by historians, anthropologists and sociologists have captured the field, concentrating on what they call “primitive” or “archaic” societies or on

¹ *Synopsis historiarum*, ed. H. Thurn (Berlin-New York, 1973), 264, lines 81–91. According to Skylitzes, Romanos’ message concludes (ironically?) that “the emperors of the Romans thus know how to repay their enemies.” For knowledge of this passage I am indebted to Denis Sullivan, and no less to William North and Alice-Mary Talbot who suggested a number of the examples used in this paper. To Jonathan Bloom and Irfan Shahīd, who advised me on much of the Arabic material and translated some of it, I likewise owe much. The comments of two anonymous readers and those of the economist Philip A. Klein on the last section of this paper were invaluable as it reached its final state.

² Ibn Ḥayyān, *Al-Muqtabis V*, ed. P. Chalmeta, F. Corriente, and M. Subh (Madrid, 1979), 177–79; see also *Cronica del Califa ‘Abderrahmān III an-Nasir entre los años 912 y 942*, trans. M. J. Viguera and F. Corriente (Sara-gossa, 1981), 203–5.

the functions of gifts in the early modern and contemporary worlds. Following the pioneering essay of Marcel Mauss, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Pierre Bourdieu, Maurice Godelier,³ and many others have fastened on exchange as the most fruitful approach to an enduring phenomenon, preferring to regard it as ritual rather than as economic behavior. I shall treat this aspect more fully in another context,⁴ confining the present paper largely to what Lord Keynes might have called the economic consequences of the gift.⁵ Yet even before embarking, it must be admitted that economic theory itself may be partly responsible for the fact that gifts have been neglected as vehicles of medieval exchange. Given that the sources understandably concentrate on offerings by and to emperors, caliphs, and kings, stressing their rarity and in many cases their uniqueness, it is hardly surprising that gifts have come up against such notions as marginal utility—Alfred Marshall's doctrine that the value of an item is determined by the need for it and by its relative scarcity instead of any intrinsic or inherent worth that it may have.⁶ Precious objects have thus fallen foul of judgments concerning "luxuries" in which modern thought, albeit unaware of the parallelism, has tended to reinforce much medieval Christian and some Muslim prejudice against goods that are not considered "necessary."⁷ They have effectively been removed from the realm of economic history.

By contrast, I shall try to show that gifts are part of what Keynes, Marshall's pupil, in a memoir of his teacher described as "a whole Copernican system by which all elements of the economic universe are kept in their places by mutual counterpoise and interaction."⁸ Such an understanding is rarely exhibited by medieval donors; indeed, many may have been unaware of the economic effects of their offerings, although we should not forget the large number of occasions on which gifts were instrumental in the negotiation of trade treaties.⁹ Rather, the messages that accompanied their presents purport to demonstrate the magnanimity of the donor,¹⁰ to teach moral lessons about the faith of the

³M. Mauss, "Essai sur le don. Forme et raison d'échange dans les sociétés archaïques," *L'Année sociologique*, n.s., 1 (1925), 30–186, trans. W. D. Halls as *The Gift. The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London, 1990); C. Lévi-Strauss, "Introduction à l'œuvre de Mauss," in his *Sociologie et anthropologie* (Paris, 1950), i–lii; P. Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de pratique . . .* (Geneva, 1972), trans. R. Nice, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, 1977), esp. 171–97; M. Godelier, *L'énigme du don* (Paris, 1996), trans. N. Scott, *The Enigma of the Gift* (Oxford-Chicago, 1999).

⁴For now, see A. Cutler, "The Empire of Things: Gift Exchange between Byzantium and the Islamic World," *Center 20. Record of Activities and Research Reports, June 1999–May 2000* (Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art, Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, 2000), 67–70, and below, 271–72. Mauss's ideas have been applied to medieval gifts by R. Cormack, "But Is It Art?" in *Byzantine Diplomacy. Papers from the Twenty-Fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Cambridge, March 1990*, ed. J. Shepard and S. Franklin (Aldershot, 1992), 219–36, and A. Cutler, "Les échanges de dons entre Byzance et l'Islam (IXe–XIe siècles)," *JSav* (January–June 1996): 51–66.

⁵Cf. J. M. Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (London, 1919).

⁶See esp. his *Principles of Economics* (London-New York, 1890).

⁷On some of these, see A. Cutler, "Uses of Luxury: On the Functions of Consumption and Symbolic Capital in Byzantine Culture," in *Byzance et les images*, ed. A. Guillou and J. Durand (Paris, 1994) 289–307, esp. 289–95.

⁸"Alfred Marshall," in *Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes*, 30 vols. (London, 1971–89), 10:205.

⁹While a perennial phenomenon (see the literature cited in *ODB* 3:2101–2, s.v. Trade treaties), the correlation between gifts and diplomacy targeted toward commercial ends is best documented in negotiations between the Palaiologoi and the Mamlūk sultans. On these see M. T. Mansouri, *Recherche sur les relations entre Byzance et l'Égypte (1259–1453) d'après les sources arabes* (Tunis, 1992), esp. 134 and tables 2 and 3, where the occasions and presents involved are set out diagrammatically.

¹⁰Thus Romanos I to al-Mahdī in Skylitzes, cited in note 1 above.

society that he represented,¹¹ or simply to assert the giver's political might.¹² Yet it would be a mistake to equate pronounced intentions with ultimate results, to assume that all effects proceeded from deliberate policy, or to impose theoretical sophistication upon the economic behavior of early medieval governments.¹³ On the other hand, "glorious gifts," as Theophylact Simokatta put it, constituted one of the strategies the raw economic value of which was understood. Describing in this manner the tribute that the Romans agreed to transmit to the Avars after their capture of Sirmium in 582, the historian observes that the goods of silver and embroidered cloth to be delivered annually to the barbarians were worth 80,000 gold coins.¹⁴

Two aspects of this passage are significant for our purposes. First, its manner of expression suggests that such agreements were first expressed monetarily and only later fulfilled in terms of commodities of equal value. Second, Simokatta's word for goods (ἐμπορίας)

¹¹Cf. al-Ma'mūn's famous response to the presents of an unidentified Byzantine emperor: "Send him a gift one hundred times greater than his, so that he may recognize the glory of Islam and the grace that Allah has bestowed on us," cited in M. Hamidullah, "Nouveaux documents sur les rapports de l'Europe avec l'Orient musulman au Moyen Age," *Arabica* 7 (1960): 286, and G. al-Hijjāwī al-Qaddūmī, *Book of Gifts and Rarities, Kitāb al-Hadāyā wa al-Tuḥaf* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996) 77, §31 (hereafter *Book of Gifts*). It is worth noting how often invitations to embrace Islam are accompanied by gifts. Early 10th-century 'Abbāsid envoys to the Volga Bulgars, for example, stop on their way to present a letter to the king of the Oghūz Turks, bidding him to convert and offering him 50 dinars, musk, and leather goods, as well as clothing of cotton, brocade, and silk. See M. Canard, "La relation du voyage d'Ibn Fadlān chez les Bulgares de la Volga," *Annuaire de l'Institut d'études orientales* 16 (1958): 41–145, esp. 78 (hereafter Canard, "Ibn Fadlān"). Of course, the practice was by no means confined to Muslims. As Bede relates (*Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors [Oxford, 1969], 170, 174), Pope Boniface V (619–625) sent a gold-embroidered robe, an "Ancyrian garment," a silver mirror, and an ivory comb adorned with gold to the Christian queen Aethelburgh in an attempt to effect the conversion of her husband, Edwin.

¹²See, e.g., the report in the anonymous chronicle known as the *Kitāb al-Uyūn* that a Byzantine monk, serving as ambassador to al-Mu'izz in 953, "saw the grandeur of Islam and the power of the sovereign the likes of which he had never seen in the country of the Greeks" (M. Canard, *Les extraits des sources arabes* [= A. A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, vol. 2.2 [Brussels, 1950], 224 (hereafter Vasiliev-Canard). Conversely, the position of *recipient* of presents as a sign of the acknowledgment due to a ruler is a leitmotif of Byzantine ideology. Thus, in the preface to the instructions that he gives his son, Constantine Porphyrogenetos tells Romanos that God "raised thee up, that the nations may bring thee their gifts and thou mayest be adored of them that dwell upon the earth." See *De administrando imperio*, ed. Gy. Moravcsik and R. Jenkins, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C., 1967), 46, lines 38–39 (hereafter *DAI*).

¹³As when, e.g., G. Musca, *Carlo Magno ed Harun al Rashid* (Bari, 1963), 108–15, suggests that Charlemagne sent "Frisian" cloths to Baghdad to correct a "balance-of-payments" problem caused by western tastes for 'Abbāsid silks, rock crystal, and other luxury objects. By contrast, it seems quite reasonable to accept as rational such decisions as the Fāṭimid calculation that funds were better spent on arming and maintaining their fleet than on the ransoming of prisoners of war as is prescribed for the treatment of infidels in the Qur'ān (*sūra* 47). See M. Campagnolo-Pothitou, "Les échanges de prisonniers entre Byzance et l'Islam aux IX^e et X^e siècles," *Journal of Oriental and African Studies* 7 (1995): 1–55, esp. 26.

¹⁴*Theophylacti Simocattae Historiae*, ed. C. de Boor and P. Wirth (Stuttgart, 1972), 45, lines 10–13 (hereafter Theoph. Sim.; the English version by L. M. and M. Whitby, *The History of Theophylact Simocatta*, is referred to as "trans. Whitby"). The Avar khagan later demanded a supplementary tribute of 20,000 pieces of gold (*ibid.*, 46, lines 13–15). We are accustomed to thinking of tribute as a one-way street, but at least on occasion, as Ibn Isfandiyyār makes clear, it could form part of a transaction essentially indistinguishable from gift exchange. Thus the ruler of Ispahbadan is said to have responded to al-Manṣūr's gift of "a royal crown and robe of honour" with "a poll-tax of one dirham of gold for each inhabitant, 300 dirhams, each containing four *dangs* of 'white' silver, 300 bales of green silk carpets," colored cottons, garments, saffron, and "a certain amount of sea fish," all laden on forty mules. *Ta' rīkh-i Isfandiyyār*, trans. E. G. Browne, *An Abridged Translation of the History of Tabaristān Compiled about A.H. 613/A.D. 1216* (Leiden, 1905), 118.

implies that the silver objects applied in this instance to the obligation were available in the marketplace rather than made expressly to discharge the debt. The commercial status of many things offered as presents will be of concern to us below, but for now it is the relationship between gifts and specie that merits investigation. Both Arab and Byzantine texts manifest perennial awareness of their parity, and hence convertibility. This is already evident with respect to tribute, as the just-cited sixth-century example makes clear. No less telling is the rhetorical device whereby spoils of war are described as δῶρα, applied equally to the 300,000 pieces of gold and silver and the Syrian garments and aromatics seized by John Tzimiskes during his Mesopotamian campaign in the early 970s.¹⁵

Where the conversion of objects into specie is the reason for attention to them, it is hardly surprising to find an author emphasize their liquidity, as the Continuator of Theophanes does with respect to the golden automata and organ sent to the melting pot by Michael II.¹⁶ More remarkable is the readiness to assign monetary value to offerings to holy places. It might be supposed that Theophylact Simokatta's extraordinary portrait of Chosroes' "dickering" with St. Sergios is an educated civil servant's expression of contempt for a calculating barbarian. With reference to a gem-studded gold cross that the "king of kings" had first taken as booty (in 549) and then embellished with yet another cross before deciding to send it to the saint's shrine at Sergiopolis, he puts into the mouth of the Sasanian king the statement that "for its value, although this does not extend beyond four thousand three hundred standard *miliaresia*, five thousand standard coins [στατῆρας] should be dispatched in its place."¹⁷ Yet contemporary accounts of Greek oblations are no less attentive to their material worth. The *vita* of Daniel the Stylite, for instance, describes a thanksgiving gift offered by a repentant heretic as "a silver image, ten pounds in weight."¹⁸ Records of this sort, abundant in monastic inventories and *typika*, suggest that the perceived effectiveness of an object was bound up with its monetary value. And the prominence of material and quantitative data in the 'Abbāsid gift lists, discussed below, suggest that as much is true of secular offerings. Aesthetic, economic, and pious gestures do not inhabit entirely separate universes.

GIFTS OF CASH, COMMODITIES, AND LABOR

If the image of Chosroes II that Theophylact Simokatta paints is one of condescension to the king's shrewdness, such behavior, far from being thought crass, is esteemed

¹⁵Leo Diaconus, *Historia*, 10.2, ed. C. B. Hase (Bonn, 1828), 163, lines 1–7. On the date of this campaign, see the literature cited in M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge, 1986), 175 n. 176. See also below, 259.

¹⁶*Theophanes Continuatus*, ed. I. Bekker (Bonn, 1838), 173, lines 6–11 (hereafter *TheophCont*), where the transaction is said to have yielded 200 kentenaria of gold.

¹⁷Theoph. Sim. (as above, note 14), 212, lines 6–16; 214, line 26–215, line 1; trans. Whitby, 152. The extended discussion of this incident is ambiguous in that Chosroes seems at first to offer a monetary substitute for the cross, then changes his mind and sends it with the provision that it be melted down: "from its value one paten and one cup should be made for the sake of the divine mysteries," and that, further, an altar cross, a gold censer, and "a Hunnic curtain adorned with gold" be bought out of the proceeds. Even these would not exhaust the value of the cross: Chosroes informs Sergios that "the remaining *miliaresia* are for your holy shrine" (ibid., 215, lines 15–24). Additional parts of his gift are a paten and other unspecified vessels inscribed with Chosroes' name. The entire transaction is depicted by the chronicler as an exchange for the child for whose birth the king had prayed to Sergios. See M. J. Higgins, "Chosroes II's Votive Gifts at Sergiopolis," *BZ* 48 (1955): 89–102.

¹⁸H. Delehaye, *Les saints stylites* (Brussels, 1923), 58.

in Arab sources. The fame of Chosroes' largesses seems to have been transmitted from one generation to another until it surfaces in the eleventh-century compilation known as *Kitāb al-Hadāyā wa al-Tuḥaf* (*Book of Gifts and Rarities*).¹⁹ Especially detailed, and consequently telling, is its account of Chosroes' gifts on the occasion of his marriage to Emperor Maurice's daughter. The report begins with the king's distribution to the imperial retinue of 2,500 "purses of money,"²⁰ followed by an offering to Maurice himself of "gifts worth ten thousand pieces of money." These are said to have included "a thousand bars of gold, each of them weighing a thousand *mithqāls*, five hundred purses of money in coins [and] a thousand flawless pearls, each of them worth four thousand dirhams." Thereafter, presents of 1,000 pieces of brocade, each said to be worth 4,000 dirhams, and 1,000 pack horses, each described as worth 2,000 dirhams "or, it is [also] said, four thousand dirhams," are listed. Given the long life of this story and the marked variation in the evaluation of at least the animals, there is little point in trying to arrive at an absolute aggregate for the gift. But the *relative* worth of its elements is noteworthy: the pearls, textiles, and pack horses clearly made up only a minor portion of its overall value.

The sense that luxurious and even sacred items are simply sweeteners, addenda to the specie that constituted the major portion of a gift, is equally apparent in Anna Komnene's record of her father's offering to Henry IV when (before August 1081) he sought the German king's aid against Robert Guiscard. Her account begins in the past tense with Alexios' agreement to send 144,000 nomismata and 100 pieces of purple silk (βλατ-τία), and advances with the explanation that this sum had already been transmitted in the form of "worked silver and Romanata of old quality"; a further 216,000 nomismata and *rogai* for twenty dignitaries would follow when the king reached Longobardia.²¹ Only much later in his transmittal letter does Alexios note that "as a mark of friendship" he is sending to Henry a golden enkolpion set with pearls, a golden θήκη containing the relics of various saints whose identity is conveyed by labels, a sardonix chalice, a crystal cup, an ἀστροπέλεκιν on a golden chain, and balsam.²²

¹⁹*Book of Gifts*, 62–63, § 5.

²⁰Basing herself on al-Qalqashandī, al-Qaddūmī defines a purse (*badra*) as containing 10,000 dirhams or 7,000 dinars. Clearly, the sum in question could vary according to the occasion: the Byzantine envoys to Baghdad in 917 were given fifty purses each containing 5,000 dirhams. See Vasiliev-Canard, 108. According to al-Juwainī, "purses stuffed with dinars" featured among the presents of "ceremonial and everyday clothing, all sorts of goblets . . . , large numbers of horses, mules and camels," as well as other paraphernalia and slaves sent by the atabeg Sa'd to the sultan Jalāl ad-Dīn, shah of Khwārizm, in the early 13th century. See the translation by J. A. Boyle, *Genghiz Khan. The History of the World Conqueror* (Seattle, Wash., 1997), 418–19.

²¹Anna Komnene, *Alexiade*, ed. B. Leib, 4 vols. (Paris, 1937–76), 1:134, lines 4–17. I cite the translation of M. Hendy, *Coinage and Money in the Byzantine Empire, 1081–1261*, DOS 12 (Washington, D.C., 1969), 47, which departs significantly from Leib's French version. For this and earlier imperial gifts to the West generally beyond the purview of the present paper, see the survey by T. C. Lounghis, "Die byzantinischen Gesandten als Vermittler materieller Kultur vom 5. bis ins 11. Jahrhundert," in *Kommunikation zwischen Orient und Okzident: Alltag und Sachkultur, Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Klasse*, Bd. 619 (Vienna, 1994), 49–67.

²²*Alexiade*, 135, lines 21–27. I take it that an *astropelekin* is some sort of meteoroidal stone carried as a talisman; see E. Trapp, *Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität*, vol. 2 (Vienna, 1996), 221. A similar if smaller combination of goods and funds is recorded by Leo Marsicanus in his Chronicle (*Die Chronik von Montecassino*, ed. H. Hoffmann, MGH, SS 34 [Hanover, 1980]), 514, lines 15–17: "octo libras solidorum michalatorum et pallium tricontasimum" sent by Alexios I to Benedict of Montecassino in June 1112. Cf. F. Dölger, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des ostromischen Reiches von 565–1453* (Munich-Berlin, 1932; repr. Hildesheim, 1976), no. 1262. In the light of yet a third recorded offering of the same type—the same emperor's promise to convey 400 gold pieces and two silk cloths to the cathedral of St. Mary in Pisa as well as lesser gifts to the archbishop

The movement of relics, above all as gifts but occasionally in trade, is by now a commonplace of western medieval studies.²³ Perhaps because the economic value assigned to one celebrated eastern example is described only in an Arabic source, it has been neglected by Byzantinists. Yahyā b. Saʿīd Antākī claims that the Greeks offered 12,000 gold pieces and 200 prisoners of war for the mandylion, lost when the Arabs had taken Edessa in the seventh century. Since the *mandīl* was also venerated by Muslims, the proposal for its redemption became a juridical issue: the resulting *fatwā* accepted it on the grounds, as Yahyā put it, that “the liberation of a single Muslim is more agreeable to God than any other thing.”²⁴ The deal reported by the Arab chronicler appears eminently plausible when the prices put on the head of other captives are considered.²⁵ Yet for our purposes it is not so much the preponderance of specie in this transaction as the common monetary basis for the evaluation of relics and prisoners that is remarkable. The equation may be extended to other forms of *sacra*. Presents (*hadāyā*) and hard cash (*amwāl*) both figure in al-Ainī’s account of Basil II’s offerings to al-ʿAzīz when he sought the Fāṭimid caliph’s approval for repairs to the Holy Sepulchre²⁶—an exchange linked with Basil’s agreement to lift a prohibition on commercial contacts.²⁷ No less when purely internal affairs were concerned, specie and precious materials were coupled in Byzantine negotiations with the holy.²⁸

Naturally, luxuries overtly marked for Christian use were not sent to Islamic courts,

and two Pisan judges (Dölger, *Regesten*, no. 1255)—this was clearly a standard practice of Alexios’, if not of his era.

²³See, generally, P. Geary, “Sacred Commodities: The Circulation of Medieval Relics,” in *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. A. Appadurai (Cambridge, 1986), 169–91 although his ample bibliography omits the critical study of the diplomatic applications of Christ relics from Constantinople, B. Schweineköper, “Christus-Reliquien-Verehrung und Politik,” *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte* 117 (1981): 183–281.

²⁴*Taʾ rīkh*, ed. and trans. I. Kratchkovsky and A. Vasiliev as *Chronique universelle*, PO 22 (Paris, 1932), 770. Al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾ rīkh al-rusūl waʾl-mulūk*, ed. M. J. de Goeje, 15 vols. (Leiden, 1879–1901), 5:98, trans. C. E. Bosworth, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, 39 vols. (Albany, N.Y., 1985–97), 30:264, furnishes an extreme example of the cost of ransom in his report on the 50,000 dirhams sent by Nikephoros I to Hārūn al-Rashīd for a female slave captured at Herakleia in 806. It should be noted, however, that the woman was desired by, if not actually betrothed to, Nikephoros’ son and that the emperor’s offering was part of a larger exchange that involved brocade garments, falcons, hunting dogs, and horses.

²⁵The premium placed upon treasured objects is evident in the value assigned to an enameled belt offered by Leo VI to an Arab governor (10,000 dinars), as against the price put on the heads of captives (107 dinars each) in a typical prisoner exchange. See Cutler, “Les échanges de dons,” 58. In a will attached to the *typikon* of the monastery of Koutlounmoussi (*Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, ed. J. Thomas and A. C. Hero [Washington, D.C., 2000], 1426, a *mandyon* and other monastic vestments are expressly bequeathed “so they may be sold to aid the captives’ . . . expenses.” The most recent survey is Campagnolo-Pothitou, “Les échanges de prisonniers,” 13.

²⁶Cited in V. Rosen, *Imperator Vasilii Bolgaroboitsa: Izvlecheniia iz letopisi Iakhʾi Antiokhiiskogo* (St. Petersburg, 1883; repr. London, 1972), 203.

²⁷G. L. F. Tafel and G. M. Thomas, *Urkunden zur älteren Handels- und Staatsgeschichte der Republik Venedig*, 3 vols. (Vienna, 1856), 1:25–30, no. XIV, and Dölger, *Regesten*, no. 770.

²⁸Explicit statements are the representations of imperial *apokombia* in the mosaics of Hagia Sophia, Constantinople. But the best-documented instance is Michael I’s gift to the Great Church when his son Theophylact was crowned co-emperor in 811. Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1885), 2:494, lines 25–33, records on this occasion “golden vessels set with stones and a set of four curtains of ancient manufacture, splendidly embroidered in gold and purple and decorated with wonderful sacred images.” At the same time Michael presented 25 pounds of gold to the patriarch and 100 pounds to the clergy. I cite the translation of C. Mango and R. Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor* (Oxford, 1997), 678.

although the distinction between the religious and secular functions of such objects would have meant little to those who made them and are of even less significance when their material value is in question. In this connection it is interesting to note that John Synkellos, who took with him more than forty kentenaria of gold to be scattered to the crowd when serving as an ambassador to al-Ma'mūn in 829/30, also brought what the Continuator of Theophanes calls two gold and gem-encrusted χερνιβόξεστα, a term used for washing sets whether for liturgical or domestic use.²⁹ These were likely filled with coins, if we may judge by the reception of Ol'ga at the Byzantine court in 957. On this occasion she was presented with a jewel-studded golden bowl containing 500 miliaresia, a mere foretaste of the wealth that would be distributed to her relatives, attendants, the *apokrisarioi* and their retainers, as well as the forty-four merchants that accompanied her.³⁰

Conspicuous as they are in the sources, extravagant presents in precious materials and coin may not exhaust the economic range of the gift phenomenon. Occasionally in the reports of donations and exchanges we catch sight of more mundane commodities, as in the "welcome wagon" that Andronikos III offered to Ibn Baṭṭūta upon his arrival in Constantinople in the early 1330s. Along with money and rugs, the emperor is said to have provided flour, bread, sheep, fowl, ghee, fruit, and fish,³¹ just as "necessities of life" formed part of the gift that Leo V had sent to an unnamed monk of Philomelion who had foretold the emperor's future.³² On a larger scale, the giraffe and elephant sent to Constantine IX by al-Mustanşir in 1053 may be understood as a response to the shipment of grain that the *basileus* had sent to Egypt in time of famine.³³ Grain also figures not as an *antidoron* but as the first item mentioned among the presents of the former rebel 'Umar b. Ḥaḥṣūn to 'Abd al-Raḥmān III in A.H. 302/A.D. 914–915; *tirāzī* brocades, Iraqi silks, jeweled swords, and other luxuries make up the rest of the list.³⁴ Clearly, ordinary commodities such as grain are no more evidence of trade than the expensive accouterments familiar from such lists. Yet equally they signal their senders' recognition of need, one condition for a subsequent and successful commercial relationship.

For two reasons it is particularly problematical to assess the impact, and sometimes even to establish the historicity, of exports of human capital. First, Muslim statements to the effect that labor forces and/or massive amounts of material were summoned from Byzantium may be no more than bombast designed to show that the emperor heeded the Commander of the Faithful. Such claims recur in Arabic sources, starting with the

²⁹*TheophCont* (as above, note 16), 96, lines 13–15. On the range of uses of *cherniboxesta*, see *ODB* s.v., 1:418. For John's mission in general, see P. Magdalino, "The Road to Baghdad in the Thought-World of Ninth-Century Byzantium," in *Byzantium in the Ninth Century: Dead or Alive?* ed. L. Brubaker (Aldershot, 1998), 195–213, esp. 196–99.

³⁰*De cerimoniis*, 2, 15, ed. J. J. Reiske, 2 vols. (Bonn, 1829), 1:597, line 22–598, line 12 (hereafter *De cer.*). I am indebted to Jeffrey Featherstone for discussions of his as yet unpublished translation of this passage. Adding up the gifts indicated, P. Grierson, "Commerce in the Dark Ages: A Critique of the Evidence," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 9 (1959): 134, arrived at a total of more than a million miliaresia.

³¹*The Travels of Ibn Baṭṭūta*, A.D. 1325–1354, trans. H. A. R. Gibb, 4 vols. (Cambridge, 1958–94), 2:504.

³²"Genesios," *Regum libri quattuor*, ed. A. Lesmüller-Werner and H. Thurn (Berlin-New York, 1978), 10, lines 20–21: στέλλει αὐτῷ τὰ πρὸς χρείαν κατ' εὐχὴν ἀναθήματα.

³³Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, ed. W. Brunet de Presle and I. Bekker (Bonn, 1853), 48, line 11–50, line 11. The event is also recorded by Skylitzes and Glykas. See N. Patterson Ševčenko, "Wild Animals in the Byzantine Park," in *Byzantine Garden Culture*, ed. A. Littlewood et al. (Washington, D.C., 2002), 69–86. See also 269, below.

³⁴Ibn Ḥayyān, *Al-Muqtabis V* (as in note 2), 75–76; trans. Viguera and Corriente, 96–97.

report of al-Ṭabarī that the Ṣāḥib al-Rūm (i.e., Justinian II) sent, in addition to 100,000 *mithqāls* of gold,³⁵ 100 workmen and 40 loads of mosaic cubes to al-Walīd.³⁶ Ṭabarī's report was written more than two centuries after the event it describes and refers not to the Great Mosque in Damascus, with which Justinian's gift is connected by al-Maqdisī,³⁷ but to al-Walīd's decision to rebuild the Mosque of the Prophet at Madīna. A similar interval separates al-Idrīsī's account of the Umayyad Mosque in Cordoba, for the *qibla* of which 'Abd al-Raḥmān III obtained tesserae from "the emperor of Constantinople."³⁸ Now, removal in time does not necessarily mean error in the transmission of fact, but the economic historian will be concerned with the lack of demonstrable effect on the industries of art in the lands identified in these reports, especially if, as has been claimed, the art of mosaic was taught to native workers in Cordoba by a visiting Byzantine craftsman.³⁹

In light of the absence of evidence for any enduring impact on domestic production, one could dismiss these gifts from overseas as economically inconsequential. (The far from negligible impact of gifts on the economies in which they were *produced* is treated in the section on "The Relation of Gifts to Economic Exchange," below.) On the other hand, if true, they would represent considerable transfers of technical skills and artistic talent. Moreover, the prestige and reputation for the creation of powerful symbolizations acquired in this way would denote incalculable political and ideological advantage achieved at minimal cost. Even in terms of banal human contact, one visiting craftsman could prompt a request for another or, at the very least, provoke a demand for further imports. Thus al-Maqqarī reports that the Mozarabic bishop Recemundo (called al-Rabī' b. Zaid), sent to Constantinople by 'Abd al-Raḥmān in 955, came back with artifacts probably for the caliphal residence at Madīnat al-Zahrā, and further, citing an anonymous source without exact date, speaks of the emperor sending 140 columns for the same palace.⁴⁰

³⁵As Vasiliev-Canard, 279 n. 1, point out, the term *mithqāl* is used as a synonym for *dīnār*, since 'Abd al-Mālik's issues of this coin weighed 1 *mithqāl* (4.25 g). In this case, therefore, the sum involved would be 425 kg of gold.

³⁶Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* (as above, note 24) 2:1194, on which see above all H. A. R. Gibb, "Arab-Byzantine Relations under the Umayyad Caliphate," *DOP* 12 (1958): 219–33, esp. 225–29.

³⁷*Aḥṣan al-Taqāsīm fī Ma'rīfat al-Aqālīm*, ed. M. J. de Goeje in *Bibliotheca geographorum Arabicorum*, 8 vols. (Leiden, 1870–94), 3:158.

³⁸P. A. Jaubert, *La géographie d'Edrisi*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1840), 2:60.

³⁹E. Lévi-Provençal, *Histoire de l'Espagne musulmane* (Paris, 1953), 3:393. Cf. H. Stern, *Les mosaïques de la Grande Mosquée de Cordoue* (Berlin, 1976), 22–25. This view would seem to be contradicted by the request of al-Ḥakam II (961–976) for another mosaicist from Constantinople. Thus Ibn 'Idhārī, *Histoire de l'Afrique et de l'Espagne intitulée Al-Bayano 'l-moghrib*, trans. E. Fagnan (Algiers, 1904), 2:392: the caliph wrote to "the king of the Rūmī . . . and ordered him to send a capable worker, in imitation of that which al-Alīd ben 'Abd al-Malik had done at the time of the construction of the mosque at Damascus." Precisely on the grounds of al-Ḥakam's request, the historicity of 'Abd al-Raḥmān's appeal to Constantinople has been contested by J. M. Bloom, "The Revival of Early Islamic Architecture by the Umayyads of Spain," in *The Medieval Mediterranean*, ed. M. J. Chiat and K. L. Reyerson (St. Cloud, Minn., 1988), 37–38.

⁴⁰*Analectes sur l'histoire et la littérature des Arabes d'Espagne*, ed. R. Dozy (Leiden, 1855; repr. Amsterdam, 1967), 1:372–73. Cf. Vasiliev-Canard, vol. 2.1 (Brussels, 1968), 331–32 n. 5. On both reports see P. Senac, "Contribution à l'étude des relations diplomatiques entre l'Espagne musulmane et l'Europe au Xe siècle. Le règne de 'Abd ar-Raḥmān III (912–961)," *Studia Islamica* 61 (1985): 49, who argues that such contacts were catalysts for Byzantine-Andalusian trade. Al-Maqqarī's reference may be compared with Theophanes' report that Justinian II was persuaded to send 'Abd al-Mālik columns for the reconstruction of the Ka'ba. See *Chronographia* (as above, note 28), 365, lines 26–27, trans. Mango and Scott, 510.

What is sure is that in Andalusia, if not elsewhere, Arab rulers were familiar with the practice of artisans traveling in teams. In 936 'Abd al-Raḥmān responded to a letter of Mūsā b. Abī l-Āfiya appealing for help in building a stronghold in the Maghreb by sending his chief architect, "30 masons, 10 carpenters, 15 diggers, 6 able lime burners, and 2 mat makers . . . chosen among the ablest of their profession [and] accompanied by a certain number of tools and accessories for the work to be realized."⁴¹ Even if we exempt the documentary and physical evidence for individual *ouvriers sans frontières*,⁴² there is reason to distinguish within the category of human capital between military forces sent overseas as "gifts" and craftsmen ordered to work for longer or shorter periods abroad. The brigade, said to be 40,000 strong,⁴³ sent along with weapons and silver to Chosroes II in 591 by Emperor Maurice, may have been instrumental in helping the Sasanian king regain his throne from the rebel Bahrām.⁴⁴ The troops did their job, some perhaps taken prisoner⁴⁵ or killed, while the rest went home. By contrast, skilled and unskilled workers made material contributions to the economy of the lands that they visited, notwithstanding the fact that we can hardly measure their impact on culture or commerce. In connection with the latter, however, one neglected passage is highly suggestive. In a chapter entitled "Rare Merchandise, Products, Slaves, Stones, etc. Imported from Abroad," Pseudo-Jāḥiẓ lists the goods and services arriving in Baghdad from various Muslim and non-Muslim countries. These last include India, China, and "the land of the Byzantines." The human contingent indicated as coming from Rūm consists of "hydraulic engineers, agronomical experts, marble workers, and eunuchs." The articles of commerce specified are "utensils of gold and silver, 'dinars' of pure gold, simple brocades (*buz̄yūn*), *abrun* (?) of brocade, swift horses, female slaves, rare utensils of red copper, unbreakable locks, and lyres."⁴⁶ The list may provoke a smile, but the overlap between the items cited here as commodities and the content of the gift lists with which we are concerned is nonetheless remarkable.

GIFTS REQUESTED, GIFTS TESTED

To the modern eye, one of the most disconcerting aspects of medieval texts is the frequency with which gifts are said to have been specifically invited. Where such requests are noted in the Byzantine sources, more often than not they are authorial devices directing the reader's attention to the savage nature of the petitioner. In this way, Theophylact Simokatta, whom we have repeatedly seen mocking the Avars, tells the story of the kha-

⁴¹Ibn Ḥayyān, *Al-Muqtabis V* (as above, note 2), 263–64, trans. Viguera and Corriente, 290–91. In addition to provisions for the workers, the caliph sent wheat, barley, figs, and honey, as well as a group of richly described silks, woolens, and made-up goods.

⁴²See A. Cutler, "A Christian Ewer with Islamic Imagery and the Question of Arab *Gastarbeiter* in Byzantium," in *Iconographica. Mélanges Piotr Skubiszewski* (Poitiers, 1999), 63–69.

⁴³Agaprios of Manbij, *Kitāb al-Unwān*, ed. and trans. A. Vasiliev, PO 8 (Paris, 1912), 466.

⁴⁴*Chronographia* (as above, note 28), 365, lines 20–28; trans. Mango and Scott, 510. Theophanes claims this as an exchange achieved after Manṣūr, 'Abd al-Malik's Christian treasurer, prevailed upon the caliph not to remove columns from "Holy Gethsemane."

⁴⁵Thus Ṭabarī, *Ta' rīkh* (as above, note 24), 2:1451, trans. J. L. Kraemer, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 34 (Albany, 1985), 90, notes two Muslim goldsmiths among the prisoners exchanged when an emissary of al-Mutawakkil visited the court of Michael II in 860.

⁴⁶C. Pellat, "Ġāhiziana, I. Le *Kitāb al-Tabassur bi-l-Tiğara* attribué à Ġāhiz," *Arabica* 1 (1954): 159.

gan who asked Maurice for one of his elephants, only to return it “whether in terror or scorn of the marvel.” The “Hun” then pesters the emperor “to fashion a golden couch and to send it to him,” a request that the emperor duly honors. Inevitably, the khagan, “as if he had been besmirched by the unworthiness of the gift,” sends it back “as though it were something cheap and common.”⁴⁷ Barbarian solecisms of this sort became legendary in Byzantium and no doubt contributed to the *topos* of the alien’s rapacity. Concerning the Pechenegs, for instance, with whom imperial representatives in Cherson had dealings in the tenth century, *De administrando imperio* observes that these people “are ravenous in their demands . . . keenly covetous of articles rare among them,” and “shameless in their demand for generous gifts (ξενάλια).”⁴⁸ Leo the Deacon, in turn, describes an ambassador to the Rus’ as corrupting Svjatoslav with gifts: “since all the Scythians are exceptionally greedy, they are extremely prone and susceptible to the promising and taking of bribes.”⁴⁹

In this light it is little wonder that Byzantine chroniclers do not dwell on imperial requests for gifts. This reserve says little, of course, of actual practice and even less about the number or nature of presents received by the emperors.⁵⁰ Gifts were required as Cassiodorus put it, *more gentium*.⁵¹ What apparently no Greek author concedes is that they were a way of buying peace, although Psellos comes closest to such an admission when he describes Constantine X’s preference for settling his differences with the barbarians by means of “presents and certain other favors” rather than warfare. With this strategy, he says, the emperor spared his treasury outlays on the military and assured himself a trouble-free existence.⁵² If the preferred Byzantine way with gifts was to exchange them domestically in such a way as to make “it possible to ask for other favors that range from gifts of more considerable economic value to privileges and favors granted, even to

⁴⁷Theoph. Sim. (as above, note 14), 45, line 19–46, line 10; trans. Whitby, 24. The Avar penchant for luxurious couches is further attested by Menander Protector in several passages preserved in the *Excerpta de legationibus* (*The History of Menander the Guardsman*, ed. and trans. R. C. Blockley [Liverpool, 1985], 48, §5.2 and 92, §8). On the first of these occasions, Justinian I sends the present to the Avars; on the second, Avar envoys come to Constantinople to receive “the usual presents” from Justin II.

⁴⁸*DAI* (as above, note 12), 54, lines 8–11.

⁴⁹*Historia*, 5.1 (as above, note 15), 77, lines 4–9. The “international” nature of the custom is borne out by a well-known example of 1338 when a Genoese merchant was asked by Toghan Temür, the khan of Cathay, to request “horses and other marvels” from the pope. The merchant sought to procure these in Venice, but the transaction remained unconsummated when the senate of the Serenissima gave permission for five to ten horses and “gioielli di cristallo,” worth 1,000–2,000 golden florins, to be exported but only in Venetian bottoms. See R. S. Lopez, “Venezia e le ‘grande linee’ dell’espansione commerciale nel secolo XIII,” in *La civiltà veneziana nel secolo di Marco Polo* (Florence, 1955), 50–51. Once again one observes the correspondence between gifts and objects of commerce.

⁵⁰Thus it is from an Arab source that we learn that John Tzimiskes asked for the parade horse and weapons of his erstwhile enemy and later commander in Damascus, Alptekin, in the course of an elaborate exchange of gifts in 975. See Ibn al-Qalanisi, *Dhayl ta’rikh Dimishq*, ed. H. F. Amedroz (Leiden, 1908), 12–14; for a French translation, M. Canard, “Les sources arabes de l’histoire byzantine aux confins des Xe et XIe siècles,” *REB* 19 (1961): 293–95. A similar version of the story is to be found in the *Chronography* of Abu’l Faraj (as below, note 124), 175, but not in any Greek source.

⁵¹*Variae*, 4.1.3. Theodoric is here acknowledging receipt of silver-colored horses from Herminafid, king of the Thoringi.

⁵²*Chronographia*, 17, ed. E. Renauld, 2 vols. (Paris, 1928), 2:146, lines 4–8. Psellos here ignores the raids of the Uzes across the Danube and Seljuk incursions on the empire’s eastern frontiers, not least Alp Arslan’s capture of Ani in 1064. For a concise survey of gifts as a means of buying peace, see N. Oikonomides, “Το όπλο του χρήματος” in *Το εμπόλεμο Βυζάντιο*, ed. K. Tsiknakas (Athens, 1997), 261–68.

measures that can have broad social and political significance,”⁵³ then it was subtler than that of other cultures. Qalqashandī notes the modest objective of “the Christian kings of Abyssinia, the Greeks, and the Franks,” who, in exchange for the presents they would send the Mamlūk sultan, sought only oil of a balsam plant that grew near ‘Ain Shams (Heliopolis) made holy by Christ’s visit during the Flight into Egypt.⁵⁴ But at least the Mongols were ready to propose grand designs that could come about if triggered by the right gifts. In 1289 the Ilkhan Arghūn offered Philip the Fair an alliance and a promise to deliver Jerusalem in return for an envoy with “rare gifts from the land of the Franks, falcons and precious stones in various colors.”⁵⁵

As ‘Abbāsīd tributaries the Ghaznavids observed a customary tariff for presents to Baghdad, distinguishing proportionally between those sent to the caliph personally, his court circle, and his ambassadors.⁵⁶ This graduated distribution recalls the careful ranking of letters addressed to foreign governments prescribed in the *Book of Ceremonies*, a code in which messages to Baghdad carried seals weighing four solidi, while the pope at Rome merited only one.⁵⁷ Although the Byzantine system addressed a wider world than Ghaznavid communications with other Muslims, it is evident that both societies operated on the basis of a clear-headed and quantified evaluation of presents whether these were for internal or external consumption. A domestic example is provided by the story of Ktenas, “an aged cleric of great wealth,” who sought the *roga* of *protospatharios* and knew enough to add a pair of earrings worth ten pounds and “a silver table with animals on it in gold relief, also valued at ten pounds” to the forty pounds of gold that he had already presented to Leo VI. The offer worked, although Ktenas lived only two more years, receiving “a stipend of one pound for each of the two years.”⁵⁸ Appraisals of this sort can be seen in a larger context in the provisions for evaluation laid out in the *Book of Ceremonies*. Notwithstanding the fact that it appears in a context quite distinct from that of the reception of the envoys from Tarsos and Ol’ga and the Rus’—the book is not a narrative history—the passage is explicitly devoted to the treatment of diplomatic missions and the assessment of their offerings.

And then [after the ambassador’s third prostration] the *silentiarioi*, who are charged with notifying the *magistros* and bringing them to the *vestosakra*, receive all the gifts; and they deliver them, and the evaluation of the gifts (διατίμησις τῶν δώρων) is done. And the officials of the *vestosakra* bring the evaluation to the *magistros* so that he knows what each

⁵³ A. Laiou, “The Correspondence of Gregorios Kyprios as a Source for the History of Social and Political Behaviour in Byzantium or, on Government by Rhetoric,” in *Geschichte und Kultur der Palaiologenzeit*, ed. W. Seibt (Vienna, 1996), 97.

⁵⁴ F. Wüstenfeld, *Die Geographie und Verwaltung von Ägypten nach den Arabischen des Abul-‘Abbās Ahmed ben Ali el-Calqashandi* (Göttingen, 1879), 13–14.

⁵⁵ B. Spuler, *History of the Mongols, Based on Eastern and Western Accounts of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (Berkeley-Los Angeles, 1972), 142.

⁵⁶ See the ranked list of goods (indigo, cloth, some of it woven with gold, musk, camphor, gems, etc.) sent in 1032 by the sultan Has‘ūd to al-Qā‘im, the new ‘Abbāsīd caliph, as detailed by C. E. Bosworth, “The Imperial Policy of the Early Ghaznawids,” *Islamic Studies* 1.3 (Islamabad, 1962): 65.

⁵⁷ *De cer.* 1:686, line 5–692, line 2. For commentary see Cutler, “Les échanges de dons,” 52–53. These gradations reproduce the nature of the gold medallions prepared as multiples of the solidus and issued as *largitio*, a practice that seems to have died out in the late 6th century. See P. Grierson, “The Kyrenia Girdle of Byzantine Medallions and Solidi,” *NC*, 6th ser., 15 (1955): 55–70.

⁵⁸ *DAI*, 50, lines 246–56.

gift is [worth], so that he will be able to recall to the emperor at the time of the exchange of gifts (ἀντιδóρων) what he should return through his ambassadors.⁵⁹

Although the text is borrowed wholesale from Peter the Patrician, we can be sure that, vis-à-vis late antiquity, this recommendation for tenth-century practice represents an elaboration rather than a reduction in the rituals attaching to the reception of foreign offerings.⁶⁰

Obviously comparable measures were taken in Baghdad. While he stresses the value of the gifts rather than the procedure applied to their assessment, Hilāl al-Šābi in his *Rules and Regulations of the 'Abbāsīd Court* includes an account of the presents sent by 'Aḍud al-Dawla to the caliph al-Ṭā'i in A.H. 367/A.D. 977. Arriving on the backs of 500 animals, the Buwayhid prince's gift was analyzed to the point where even the "silvery loops" sealing the ten embroidered bags containing 50,000 Ammāni dinars were observed, as well as "500 garments varying in quality from the royal brocade costing 200 dīnārs to the simple white garment, the dyeing of which costs half a dīnār."⁶¹ It is from such documents that the 'Abbāsīd gift lists, of which the *Kitāb al-Hadāyā wa al-Tuḥaf* is the best preserved, were derived. I have already cited this book in connection with the traces it contains of Chosroes II's reputed liberality,⁶² an account unsubstantiated by any citation of the author's source. But gifts between Muslims and on occasion those attributed to Byzantine emperors⁶³ are sometimes provided with an apparatus that records the name of the author's informant, often an eyewitness to the event, and/or embedded in so meticulously detailed a report of their circumstances that they cannot be dismissed out-of-hand as fiction. Even if we cannot rely on the quantitative data supplied—if any element of these registers is exaggerated, it is the number of, say, silk brocades furnished or their worth—for the moment it is not the values assigned to these items but the act of evaluation that is significant. Purposive and ostensibly precise, they reveal an attitude toward gift-giving and gift-recording that is fundamentally economic. In their utility for us, then, as well as for their original audience, they differ from the fullest of Byzantine lists, in the *Digenes Akrites*, where the value of gifts is surely inflated for dramatic purposes.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ *De cer.* 1:89, 407, lines 7–13. I am indebted to Alexander Alexakis for his help with this passage.

⁶⁰ On such elaboration, see Averil Cameron, "The Construction of Court Ritual: The Byzantine *Book of Ceremonies*," in *Rituals of Royalty. Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge, 1987), 126, and on the place of these extracts from Peter in the design of the *Book* as a whole, *ODB* 1:596, s.v. *De ceremoniis*.

⁶¹ *Rusūm dār al-Khilāfa*, trans. E. A. Salem (Beirut, 1977), 79. Other components of the gift included "30 gilded and nongilded silver trays containing ambergris, purified musk, musk bags, camphor, . . . gilded statues," Indian swords, and parade horses.

⁶² Note 19 above. A brief survey of silks as gifts in the Arab world is offered by M. Lombard, *Les textiles dans le monde musulman du VIIe au XIIe siècle* (Paris, 1978), 193–94.

⁶³ Especially valuable are the monetary calculations offered in the *Kitāb al-Hadāyā* regarding a gift of Constantine IX to al-Mustansir in A.H. 427/A.D. 1046. It included "thirty *qintārs* of gold, each *qintār* of which was equivalent to [seven] thousand two hundred Byzantine (*Rūmī*) dinars, plus ten thousand Arabic dinars. Thus the total value was two hundred sixteen thousand Byzantine dinars plus three hundred thousand Arab dinars." See *Book of Gifts* (as above, note 11), 109, §82 and cf. 196–97, §263 (Romanos IV's distribution in Constantinople "on the day of their greatest feast" [Easter?] in 1071). (It is self-evident that the *qintārs* in question refer not to the Arab weight system but to Byzantine *kentenaria*). For Muslim gifts complete with valuations, see 66, §11; 68, §16; 79, §35; 84, §46 and *passim*.

⁶⁴ *Digenes Akritis. The Grottaferrata and Escorial Versions*, ed. and trans. E. Jeffreys (Cambridge, 1998), bk. 4, lines 704–15, 791–96, 899–912, 920–30. Of the first of these (Eudokia's dowry), M. F. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy c. 300–1450* (Cambridge, 1985), 217–18, has justly remarked that, while the figures given are "doubtless . . . fantastical," the truly striking aspect of the passage is "the resemblance of the

Apart from the difference between documentary intention and literary effect, another dissimilarity characterizes our sources. The distinction between diplomatic gifts, regulated, as we have seen, by custom if not actually under the control of respective chanceries, and presents (wedding gifts, dowries) offered in affection might seem to be critical. Yet the contrast may not be as great as it appears at first sight, for on several occasions these were two sides of the same coin. When Baldwin III of Jerusalem, threatened by Nūr al-Dīn, took a Greek bride in 1158, her uncle, Manuel I, is said by William of Tyre to have sent her “100,000 hyperpera of standard weight” (*iusti ponderis*), plus “10,000 of the same coins” for the expenses of her wedding. Her outfit of “gold, gems, clothing and pearls, tapestries and silks, as well as precious vessels, might justly be valued at an additional 14,000 [hyperpera].”⁶⁵ Loving and generous as this present may have been, it was approached by that which Manuel bestowed on Baldwin himself. This, according to the same source, “was reputed to amount to 22,000 hyperpera and 3,000 marks of purest silver” (*argenti examinitissimi*), supplemented again by garments, silks, and precious vases. William does not specify the gifts lavished upon the king’s “countless” followers, limiting his description to the adjective “profuse,” as he had “learned from certain people whose testimony is wholly reliable.”⁶⁶ Once again, the signs of economic *force majeure* are unmistakable. Leaving Cilicia where he had been campaigning, the emperor entered Antioch in triumph, while the threat of joint Crusader-Byzantine action caused Nūr al-Dīn to release several Crusader leaders and thousands of other captives.

Manuel’s political triumph cannot be entirely separate from the fact that the figures for his largesse are recorded. Nor is it wholly cynical to suppose that long gift lists were created and read as indices to both wealth and might. Even where they are not expressed numerically, as is the case with Ibn Ḥammād’s *Akhbār Mulūk Banī ‘Ubayd*,⁶⁷ a clear correlation is propounded between a man’s generosity and his authority. This elementary chronicle of Fāṭimid history devotes a single line to the foundation of Cairo by Jawhar, al-Mu‘izz’s generalissimo, but vastly greater space to a catalogue of the gifts that the soldier presented to the caliph when the latter installed himself in the citadel of his new capital in A.H. 362/A.D. 972–973. Ibn Ḥammād’s one and one-half page list, starting with four caskets of carved wood, each of which had to be carried by four men, containing vessels of gold and silver, and culminating in 600,000 dinars, is interrupted only once. At the point where the bamboo case containing a gem-encrusted crown (*tāj*) is mentioned, the author pauses to observe that al-Mu‘izz was the first of his dynasty to wear the crown.⁶⁸

general terms in which wealth is expressed . . . to those expressed” in other Byzantine accounts [e.g., wills, *typika*] of private fortunes.

⁶⁵ *Willelmi Tyrensis archiepiscopi chronicon*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens, CCSL, Continuatio medievalis 63A (Turnhout, 1986), 843, lines 22–28. For the context of the marriage, see R.-J. Lilie, *Byzantium and the Crusader States, 1096–1204* (Oxford, 1993), 195–76.

⁶⁶ *Willelmi Tyrensis . . . chronicon*, 847, lines 52–57.

⁶⁷ Ed. and trans. M. Vonderheyden as *Histoire des rois ‘obaïdides* (Algiers-Paris, 1927). The exception to Ibn Ḥammād’s reluctance to quantify occurs at the end of the long list of gifts considered immediately below. Anticipating Adam Smith’s and Marx’s labor theory of value, he describes the two carpets given by Jawhar to al-Mu‘izz as having taken two years to create with their makers earning a salary of 10,000 dinars.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 68–69. Al-Maqrīzī, *Itti‘āz al-Ḥunafā bi-Akhbār al-Faṭimiyyīn al-Khulafā*, ed. Jamal al-dīn al-Shayyāl, 2 vols. (Cairo, 1967), 1:134, adds that Jawhar provided al-Mu‘izz with a golden throne in the palace that he had prepared for the caliph. For the larger context, see J. M. Bloom, “The Origins of Fatimid Art,” *Muqarnas* 3 (1985): 20–38.

Jawhar's wealth, attested by the material splendor of his offerings, translates into power: he is the kingmaker.

GIFTS AS CAPITAL, SYMBOLIC AND OTHERWISE

If political power is a domain one of whose principal dimensions is wealth, and gift-giving a major ostensive aspect of that wealth, the messages conveyed by gifts refer by no means only to politics. More directly they allude to the parties involved in the transaction and affirmed their "stock," the larger portion of wealth that was enhanced by the gift or remaining after the expenditure involved in its donation. This wealth was understood as capital, not in the sense of a sum invested in the market in the expectation of financial return⁶⁹ but as material possessions that bespoke both the larger authority that came with, say, dynastic succession or military conquest and the prestige that undergirded such authority. One means by which this capital was accumulated, recognized, and conveyed was the transfer of gifts. It is time to look at such transfers and to assess their contribution to the actual and reputed capital of an individual and the entity that he or she was seen to represent.

In the fifteenth century the Egyptian historian al-Maqrīzī, seeking to demonstrate the esteem in which Saladin held Nūr al-Dīn, records at length and almost nostalgically the presents that the sultan had sent to his predecessor and nominal ruler of Egypt:

furnishings, objects of gold and silver, crystal and jade, the like of which would have been hard to find, precious stones and pearls of great value, in money sixty thousand dīnārs, together with many rare and desirable curios. There was also an elephant, pieces of red *attābī* and three Balakhshah rubies weighing more than thirty *mithqāls*.⁷⁰

It is clear that the Arab audience of such texts expected that the gems would remain in the state treasury to bring luster (in several senses) to the image of the ruler. While some large distributions are understood as signs of caliphal munificence,⁷¹ in the early fourteenth century, Ibn al-Tiḡtaqā, for example, criticizes al-Muqtadir for frittering away the jewel treasury (*dār al-jawhar*) that had included the "hyacinth" stone that al-Rashīd had bought for 300,000 dinars."⁷² At least as late as the Fāṭimid era there existed a storehouse

⁶⁹Nonetheless, *rogai* of the type acquired by Ktenas (above, note 58) could be considered a sort of government bond yielding an annuity. See P. Lemerle, "'Roga' et rente d'état au Xe et XIe siècles," *REB* 25 (1967): 77–100.

⁷⁰Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-Ma'rīfāt Duwal al-Mulūk*, ed. M. Ziyāda, 2 vols. (Cairo, 1934), 1.1:50, trans. R. J. C. Broadhurst as *A History of the Ayyūbid Sultans of Egypt* (Boston, 1980), 43–44. 'Attābī is taffeta usually striped in black and white; *balakhshāhs* come from the Altai Mountains in Badakhshan.

⁷¹Notably Hārūn al-Rashīd's disbursement of gems, objects of gold and silver, specie, *khila'* (robes of honor), and aromatics when, in A.H. 167/A.D. 781, he consummated his marriage to his wife, Zubayda. See *Book of Gifts*, 121–22, §111. The expenses of the wedding ceremony are here described as amounting to 50 million dinars "besides what Hārūn spent of his own money."

⁷²*On the Systems of Government and the Moslem Dynasties*, trans. C. E. J. Whitting (London, 1947; repr. 1970), 255. Hārūn al-Rashīd's collection of gems was legendary. Among many other stories, he is said to have bought the "Orphan" pearl (al-Yatīma) for 70,000 dinars (see *Book of Gifts*, 181, §224), and ordered the recovery of the ruby ringstone known as al-Jabal from the Tigris where his brother and predecessor, al-Hādī, had thrown it: *ibid.*, 184, §232.

for royal gifts,⁷³ whence presumably they were distributed to the many treasuries described in the *Kitāb al-Hadāyā* as dedicated to particular classes of object. The destruction of these magazines and the commercial dispersal of their contents “to other cities and all countries [where] they became beautiful adornments and objects of pride for their kingdoms”⁷⁴ in and after 1068 signaled the decline of a dynasty that would survive in name for another century.

Although gems may have been prized as much by the Byzantines as by the Muslims,⁷⁵ they figure far less often in Greek accounts of gifts. Only ‘Abbāsīd sources report, for example, “the thousand flawless pearls” sent by Maurice to Chosroes II or the jewel-encrusted beakers, flasks, buckets, knives, jars, and boxes that formed parts of Romanos Lekapenos’ present to al-Rādī.⁷⁶ It would be a mistake to treat all such reports as fabrications on the part of later Muslim chroniclers intent on depicting the subservience of the Rūmī. Rather, it is evident that the two societies participated in a “shared culture”⁷⁷ of luxurious objects, with precious stones—most of which originated in lands far beyond the imperial frontiers—bulking less large in the Byzantine than in the Arab consciousness. One measure of this contrast is available in the huge body of literature produced in Islam on the sources, nature, and uses of gems as against Greek interest in their symbolic and curative powers.⁷⁸

Some index to the relative economic value attached in Byzantium to the constituent parts of gifts is provided by reports on displays of booty, when, as we have seen in the case of John Tzimiskēs’ triumph after the conquest of Mayyāfāriqīn, coins, objects of gold and silver, clothing, and aromatics, all described as “*dōra* of the Agarenes,” are said to have been displayed to an admiring populace along the Mesē.⁷⁹ The visual impact of perfumes and scented woods may be a puzzle, but there can be no doubt about their function as stores of wealth.⁸⁰ No less precious, and all but ubiquitous in the lists of both booty and gifts, was silk. Clothing in this material, it has been observed, was “as good

⁷³ Mentioned in a letter of al-Hāfiz to Roger II of Sicily acknowledging the Norman king’s presents, on which see M. Canard, “Une lettre du calife fātimite al-Hāfiz (524–544/1130–1149) à Roger II,” in *Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi Ruggeriani* (Palermo, 1955), 125–46, esp. 145. Unfortunately, Roger’s letter and accompanying gift list are not preserved. Specialized treasuries housing sacred vessels, linens, and money are reported in the Byzantine monastery of the Evergetis in the 11th century. See Thomas and Hero, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, 462, 491.

⁷⁴ *Book of Gifts*, 230, §372.

⁷⁵ The use of pearls, emeralds, and *hyacinthi* (sapphires? aquamarines? amethysts?) on harness trappings is expressly forbidden to private individuals in a law of Leo I (CIC, *CI* 11.12 [11]), although other stones are permitted.

⁷⁶ *Book of Gifts*, 63, §5; 99–100, §73. The implications of M. F. Hendy’s astute observation, in the face of the Byzantine prohibition on trade in bullion with Syria in the late 7th century, that gifts of jewelry would constitute a convenient and acceptable means of exporting gold seem not to have been exploited. See the discussion in his *Studies*, 275–99.

⁷⁷ I borrow the phrase from O. Grabar, “The Shared Culture of Objects,” in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. H. Maguire (Washington, D.C., 1997), 115–29.

⁷⁸ A valuable survey of Arab literature on this topic is provided by M. Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften in Islam* (Leiden, 1972), esp. 118–22; for Byzantine attitudes see s.v. Gems in *ODB* 2:828.

⁷⁹ Note 15 above.

⁸⁰ Thus at the head of Theophanes’ list of stored valuables found when Herakleios took Chosroes’ palace at Dastagerd are “a great quantity of aloes and big pieces of aloes wood, each weighing seventy or eighty pounds.” See his *Chronographia* (as above, note 28), 451, lines 3–6, trans. Mango and Scott, 451.

and as prestigious as cash and interchangeable with it.”⁸¹ In 950 at the Byzantine court Liutprand famously witnessed the almost comic spectacle of officials so encumbered by the salaries paid out in gold by the emperor that they needed help in removing their money bags from the hall of the Nineteen Couches.⁸² But, as Nicholas Oikonomidès remarked, the head table bearing these bags was also laden with silk garments, *skaramangia* conveyed in appropriate numbers—a fact that in itself denotes a precise evaluation of these garments—to the *raiktor*, the *patrikioi*, and possibly other members of the imperial hierarchy. The effective equivalence of silk and gold is clearly suggested by the parallelism between occasions when gold was used to make up for a shortage of silk garments⁸³ and those times when the latter formed parts of *rogai* distributed by an emperor temporarily pressed for gold.⁸⁴ That such embarrassments were not limited to the tenth century is indicated in the reign of Romanos IV Diogenes who resorted to the substitution of silk for gifts of specie.⁸⁵ At least in Arabia, woven robes were accepted as tax payments from the very start of the Umayyad dynasty. Al-Balādhuri (d. 892), who records the rise and fall of these levies over time, makes it clear that figured silks made by the (Christian) inhabitants of Najrān constituted the most valuable commodities of this class.⁸⁶

The ready correlation between silks and capital in both Greek and Muslim society is further suggested by the circumstances in which the precious fabric was stored and distributed. In tenth-century Byzantium, *skaramangia* were numbered, along with undershirts, purple-dyed hoods, and red leather boots, among the commodities brought along on imperial campaigns to give to “distinguished refugees and for sending to distinguished and powerful foreigners.”⁸⁷ These were presumably kept in a state treasury of the sort on which al-Faḍl, the vizier of Hārūn al-Rashīd, reports in detail.⁸⁸ Late in the

⁸¹This quotation and much of the paragraph that follows I borrow from N. Oikonomidès, “Title and Income at the Byzantine Court,” in Maguire, *Byzantine Court Culture* (as above, note 77), 199–215, esp. 200–202. The role of silk as a substitute for specie was earlier noted by Hendy, *Studies*, e.g., 229, on the case of Romanos IV who, when he ran out of gold for the payment of *rogai*, replaced it with silk.

⁸²*Antapodosis*, 6, 10, ed. J. Becker, MGH, *ScriptRerGerm* (Hanover, 1915), 157, line 29–158, line 34.

⁸³*De cer.*, 1:668, line 19–669, line 3. Shortages of costume periodically affected the Arab world. Muḥammad ibn Sasrā, *Al-Durra al-Muḍīʾa fiʾl-Dawla al-Zāhirīya*, ed. and trans. W. M. Brinner as *A Chronicle of Damascus 1389–1397*, 2 vols. (Berkeley-Los Angeles, 1963), 1:154, reports an eyewitness account of a viceroy of Syria when reviewing his infantrymen, who were reduced to donning the garments worn by their precursors as they entered his presence.

⁸⁴Ἡ συνέχεια τῆς χρονογραφίας τοῦ Ἰωάννου Σκυλίτση, ed. Eu. Th. Tsolakes (Thessalonike, 1968), 142, lines 5–7, cited by Oikonomidès, “Title and Income,” 202, note 15.

⁸⁵D. Jacoby, “Silk in Western Byzantium before the Fourth Crusade,” *BZ* 84/85 (1991–92): 489. For Alexios I’s present to Henry IV combining gold coins and silk, see *Alexiade* (as above, note 21).

⁸⁶*Kitāb futūḥ al-Buldā n*, trans. P. K. Hitti as the *Origins of the Islamic State* (New York, 1916; repr. Beirut, 1966), 103–5.

⁸⁷Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *Three Treatises on Imperial Military Expeditions*, ed. J. F. Haldon (Vienna, 1990), 110, lines 247–49; cf. 108, lines 225–32. One example of offerings from this traveling wardrobe are the brocade garments given (along with jewels, parade horses, and mules) by Tzimiskes to Alptekin in an exchange outside Damascus in A.H. 365/A.D. 975. See Ibn al-Qalānisi (as above, note 50), 14, trans. Canard, 295. Of course, such garments were by no means only sent abroad. Hārūn ibn Yahyā, a prisoner in early 10th-century Constantinople, tells of the bestowal of *khilaʾ* on other Muslim prisoners after they had acclaimed the emperor in the Hagia Sophia. See Vasiliev-Canard, 391.

⁸⁸The inventory is preserved in the *Book of Gifts*, 207–8, §302. The same text, 190, §243, provides what may be the best illustration that silk, like gold and silver, was subject to thesaurization: when in A.H. 324/A.D. 936 the treasury of the vizier Abū Jaʿfar Muhammad b. al-Qāsim al-Kharkī was opened after his flight, there were found “[f]orty-year-old labeled sacks of pure silk.” Upon opening, the contents are said to have

reign of al-Muqtadir (908–932), Miskawayh notes that great men kept *khila'* (robes of honor) in their houses for presumably similar purposes. The context of this observation is an excuse that the caliph might have used, claiming that “there were no robes ready,” to delay an investiture.⁸⁹ In this instance the ruse may well have been politically motivated, but given what such outfits could cost,⁹⁰ at least when distributed on a large scale, one can understand al-Muqtadir’s reticence. On occasion robes of honor would have been distributed in vast numbers. Dwarfing the number of 228 guests that the hall of the Nineteen Couches normally accommodated,⁹¹ 1,200 senior officials “without counting other personages who received this favor,” were awarded robes of honor in Cairo in A.H. 708/A.D. 1308–9 when the Mamlūk sultan Baybars II al-Jashinkīr received the caliph’s diploma of investiture.⁹²

If gifts from a ruler to his officials are fairly understood as part of their salary, those he received from his appointees are surely to be considered a sort of tax. Such transactions were expressions of an ethic rarely reported when it was observed but pounced upon when it was transgressed. Thus al-Mufaḍḍal reports that the sultan al-ʿĀdil (A.H. 694–696/A.D. 1294–96) received horses and textiles from his amīrs, “a present the value of which reached 10,000 dirhams and even more. But he bestowed on them no present in recognition of that which he had received, as he was obliged to do by the customs that kings observe.”⁹³ Muslim gift exchange was grounded in an ideal world of courtesy and distilled in a ninth-century manual of court etiquette in which this world was notionally identified with the Sasanian empire. The *Kitāb al-Tāj*, attributed to al-Jāḥiẓ, includes in a chapter on protocol for those who were familiars of the caliph the observation that the sovereign had the right to receive presents from them, while they, in turn, must give what

crumbled “as a result of long storage.” For other examples of silk stored in Arab treasuries, see Lombard, *Les textiles*, 194–98. An early Byzantine example of the value of clothing as capital is provided by the report of John of Antioch, 214b, §4 (in *Fragmenta historica graecorum*, ed. K. Müller, 5 vols. [Paris, 1841–84], 5:30) that ca. 495 Anastasios sold Zeno’s wardrobe to finance his Isaurian wars.

⁸⁹ *Kitāb Tajārib al-umam*, ed. and trans. H. F. Amedroz and D. S. Margoulioth as *The Eclipse of the 'Abbasid Caliphate*, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1920–21), 4:237.

⁹⁰ E. Ashtor, *Histoire des prix et des salaires dans l'Orient médiéval* (Paris, 1969), 55, describes one *khil'a* as costing 100 dinars. Clearly, this occupied the lower end of a scale that could rise steeply, especially in light of the fact that the term was generally used to designate not a single item of clothing but an ensemble. See *EI*², s.v. *khil'a*.

⁹¹ A. P. Kazhdan and M. McCormick, “The Social World of the Byzantine Court,” in Maguire, *Byzantine Court Culture* (as above, note 77), 176.

⁹² Al-Mufaḍḍal, *Histoire des sultans mamlouks*, ed. and trans. E. Blochet, PO 14 (Paris, 1920), 593. The historian observes that “no one had ever heard of such prodigality in earlier reigns,” on which comment see note 125 below. In the reign of the caliph al-Āmir (A.H. 495–525/A.D. 1101–1130), the distribution of costumes (*kiswa*) was so lavish that the Festival of Fast-Breaking (*ʿīd al-fiṭr*) became known as the Festival of Gala Costumes (*ʿīd al-ḥulal*). See P. Sanders, *Ritual, Politics, and the City in Fatimid Cairo* (Albany, N.Y., 1994), 79. Sanders, 172 n. 218, suggests that on these occasions the ceremony included women; if so, this would obviously have greatly increased the size of the distribution.

⁹³ *Histoire des sultans mamlouks*, 593. The passage that immediately follows is worth citing since it sets out both the doctrine of noblesse oblige as it was understood in the 14th-century Arab world and the capital expenditure involved in the custom: “In fact, the kings were accustomed when they entered a town such as Damascus, the well-guarded, to distribute gifts and presents to the amīrs, to the great and to lesser men, to the commanders of the troops, on their own initiative and not as a response to the politesses and the gifts with which they had been presented, above all when a prince was in the early stages of his reign and at the beginning of the sovereignty.”

they hold dearest: "If he loved amber, he offered amber; if he was a lover of fabrics and luxurious costumes, he offered robes and costumes; if he was brave and a lover of horses, he offered a horse, a lance, or a saber."⁹⁴ The passage, which continues in this vein, may be no more than a piece of utopian nostalgia, but it spells out the belief that transfers of the author's own day had their origins in purely symbolic gifts in kind.

Al-Jāhiz, or whoever wrote these lines, may have found in the Sasanian world a model for behavior, but other Arabs, before and after him, as well as western Europeans, looked to contemporary Byzantium as a source of objects that carried a particular mystique. It matters less whether their accounts of a Constantinopolitan origin for these goods are true than that they were believed to be so, a credence that lent special force when a present was perpetuated in local use. Among the gifts that Emperor Henry III conveyed to Sts. Simon and Juda in Goslar, a church that he had founded as his royal chapel before 1050, was a chalice said to have been made from the heavy gold seal on a letter that he received from "the king of Greece," while the letter itself was recycled as a pallium for the altar.⁹⁵ Perhaps unsurprisingly these are no longer preserved, but among numerous objects from the so-called Guelph treasure—precious metal vessels, silk vestments, and relics reputed to have been given in 1172 to Henry the Lion, duke of Saxony, by Manuel Komnenos—there survive a chalice in Trzemeszno Abbey in Poland and the "paten of St. Bernward" in Cleveland.⁹⁶ The velocity with which these objects circulated upon their initial arrival in the West is explicated by more discursive reports, both Muslim and Latin, of the Byzantine custom of "re-gifting." A revealing report by an emissary of the 'Abbāsīd caliph al-Mutawakkil on a prisoner exchange effected with Michael III in A.H. 246/A.D. 860–861 tells how "the emperor accepted my gifts [1,000 bags of musk, silk garments, saffron, etc.] and did not give orders that any of them be handed on to anyone else."⁹⁷ Concerning clothing in particular, Niketas Choniates recounts the story of Manuel Komnenos' gift of his surcoat, embroidered with purple and gold, to Gabras, Kılıç Arslan's envoy on the field of Myriokephalon.⁹⁸ I shall discuss elsewhere the abundant evidence for the recycling of prestige-laden vestments in Byzantium and Islam; to indicate the economic significance of these exchanges, suffice it for now to point to 'Ubayd-Allah, a Syrian provincial governor who died in 901 after passing on to the caliph al-Mut'adīd garments "of the then Byzantine sovereign" (Leo VI) of purple brocade woven with gold,

⁹⁴*Le Livre de la Couronne. Kitāb al-Tāj fī ahlāq al-mulūk, ouvrage attribué à Ġāhiz*, trans. C. Pellat (Paris, 1954), 166.

⁹⁵*Mittelalterliche Schatzverzeichnisse. Von der Zeit Karls des Grossen bis zur Mitte des 13. Jahrhunderts*, ed. B. Bischoff (Munich, 1967), no. 128, p. 130, lines 32–34.

⁹⁶P. de Winter, *The Sacral Treasury of the Guelphs*, exhib. cat., Cleveland Museum of Art (Cleveland, 1985). On the Trzemeszno chalice, see P. Skubiszewski, "The Iconography of a Romanesque Chalice in Poland," *JWarb* 34 (1971): 40–64.

⁹⁷Preserved in al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, 2:1450, trans. Kraemer (as above, note 45), 169. A much later example is provided by a Florentine witness to the Mamlūk sultan Barqūq's redistribution to his "barons" of the gifts, borne on the backs of "one hundred camels," from the admiral of Damascus. See S. Sigoli, *Visit to the Holy Places of Egypt, Sinai, Palestine, and Syria in 1384*, trans. T. Belloni and E. Hoade, *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum* 6 (Jerusalem, 1948), 173–74.

⁹⁸*Historia*, ed. J. L. van Dieten (Berlin, 1975), 189, lines 50–63. According to Choniates, this was a spontaneous offering in exchange for a double-edged sword and a horse with a bridle adorned in silver sent by the sultan.

each said to be worth 2,000 dinars, and a girdle “fashioned of two thousand *mithqāls* of gold inlaid with enamel . . . that cost ten thousand dinars.”⁹⁹

Despite the huge value imputed to such artifacts, it may well be misleading when dealing with medieval objects to treat them as constituting *either* economic *or* symbolic capital.¹⁰⁰ The recycling of gold, silver, silks, gems, and rock crystal denotes their liquidity¹⁰¹ just as their fungible character is demonstrated by the substitution of one of these goods for another or for gifts of specie.¹⁰² So, too, the sort of potlatch ceremonies that Mauss discovered in Malinowski’s and others’ accounts of the South Pacific and the American Northwest¹⁰³ do not translate well to the medieval Mediterranean. Unknown, so far as I am aware, in Byzantium, in Muslim reports they are normally limited to circumcision ceremonies or attributed to Mongol potentates.¹⁰⁴ Rather than attempt to assimilate Arab and Byzantine gifts to modern or “archaic” practice, it seems more useful to view them as historically contingent, in the settings in which they flourished and in terms of the economies and cultures that they represented.

THE RELATION OF GIFTS TO ECONOMIC EXCHANGE

Most of the gifts that I have considered above belong to the category that today would be described as “élite” goods. Although this qualification normally differentiates them from commodities traded in bulk, it is immediately transferred to the agents of such exchanges, their sponsors and recipients. As a result, presents of this sort are more likely to be bearers of ideological messages.¹⁰⁵ But this function does not require that they be

⁹⁹*Book of Gifts*, 89, §62. On the recycling of clothing, see further A. Cutler, “Exchanges of Clothing in Byzantium and Islam: Asymmetrical Sources, Symmetrical Practices,” *XX^e Congrès International d’Études Byzantines, pré-actes*. 1, *Séances plénières* (Paris, 2001), 91–95.

¹⁰⁰Cf. Bourdieu, *Theory of Practice* (as above, note 3), 171–83. Obviously, the “turquoise table of priceless value, the edges of which were adorned (with precious stones),” repeatedly looted from each other by Arab leaders in the mid-11th century, had considerable material worth. But no less clearly it was an object replete with immense symbolic capital. As the *Book of Gifts*, 194–95, §256, notes, it “had passed down to the Abbasids from the treasuries of the Umayyads, to whom it had been transferred in turn from the Sasanid treasures.”

¹⁰¹One example, striking both because it represents the reuse of a royal gift and reveals a deliberate plan for recycling its precious material, is the provision in the will of Remigius, bishop of Reims (d. 533), that a *vasa*, weighing 18 pounds and given to him by Clovis on the occasion of the king’s baptism, should be melted down to make a thurible, a chalice, and other *sacra* for his church. See Hincmar, *Testamentum S. Remigii*, ed. B. Krusch, MGH, *ScriptRerMerov*, vol. 3 (Hanover, 1896), 337.

¹⁰²Beyond the examples already cited, one could note the Spanish vizier Mansūr’s bestowal on the Christian and Muslim princes who had helped him in a victorious campaign in A.H. 387/A.D. 997 of “two thousand two hundred and eighty-five pieces of various kinds of *ṭirāzī* silk, twenty-one pieces of sea-wool, two ‘*anbarī*’ robes [i.e., perfumed with ambergris], eleven pieces of *siqlātūn* [silk in a variety of colors dependent on its place of origin] . . . seven brocade carpets . . . and two marten furs.” For the complete catalogue, see al-Maqqarī, *Analectes* (as above, note 40), 1:271.

¹⁰³Mauss, *The Gift*, esp. 8–13, 20–46, 72–76.

¹⁰⁴Coins showered on guests at circumcision rites: *Book of Gifts*, 138, §139, 141; Mongol distributions: see, e.g., al-Juwainī (as above, note 20), 254–55, 259–60. The famous “hundredfold gift” of al-Ma’mūn (note 11 above) was not an act of potlatch but, as I have indicated, a gesture with specifically political intent. That it was an act of calculation, rather than abandon, is indicated by the conclusion of the story: learning that the Byzantines prize musk and sable above all, al-Ma’mūn orders that an additional 200 *ratls* of musk and 200 sable pelts be sent to them.

¹⁰⁵Cf. notes 11 and 12 above.

removed from the conditions that applied to less celebrated transactions. I shall suggest that the material circumstances of gifts, as well as what were often their objectives and results, tend to lessen the force of the customary distinction between economic and non-economic exchange. Although testimonia to the distribution of luxurious goods do not in themselves witness to commercial activity,¹⁰⁶ to divorce the two activities entirely would be to adopt the opposite extreme.

In the first place, a number of sources point to the presence, and even the participation, of merchants at events that involved gift exchanges. As we have seen, those who accompanied Ol'ga to Constantinople in 975 received handouts in coin along with the rest of her retinue.¹⁰⁷ Conversely, traders themselves could be the means by which imperial presents were transmitted. A letter of Manuel II Palaiologos to the Mamlūk sultan Faraj declares that he has entrusted five falcons and a falconer to the care of a Constantinopolitan trader whose name is disguised in the Arabic form Soumas.¹⁰⁸ Better known is Liutprand's report of Liutfred, the "rich merchant of Mainz, bearer of courtly presents" from the Italian king Berengar to Constantine VII, in return for those that the emperor had sent in 949.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, on occasion it would not be excessive to say that a foreigner's designation as "ambassador" or "merchant" is a function of the purpose of his visit rather than a clear-cut distinction in the minds and attitudes of those upon whom he called.¹¹⁰ A letter of Muḥammad b. Ṭughj al-Ikhshīd to Romanos Lekapenos sets out the Egyptian amīr's permission for the emperor's ambassadors "to trade in the goods that you have sent for this purpose" and allows them "to sell and buy all that they wish to desire."¹¹¹ Similarly, while it specifies that goods brought in for sale are generally tithed, Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb's late eighth-century handbook on taxes specifies that an envoy from "the Christian prince" is not subject to this treatment and that his status as ambassador is recognizable from the fact that he is accompanied by horses, goods, and slaves intended as gifts, as well as from the customary letter validating his mission.¹¹²

Having arrived in the land of their destination, both envoy and merchant needed a

¹⁰⁶Grierson, "Commerce in the Dark Ages," 125.

¹⁰⁷Note 30 above. Another example of such a "mixed" mission is provided by Ibn Ḥayyān, *Al-Muqtabis V* ([as above, note 2], 47, trans. Viguera and Corriente, 365): when an envoy of the lord of Sardinia arrived in Cordoba in August 942, he was accompanied by Amalfitan merchants bringing silver ingots, brocade, etc.

¹⁰⁸H. Lammens, "Correspondances diplomatiques entre les sultans mamlouks d'Égypte et les puissances chrétiennes," *ROC* 9 (1904): 361.

¹⁰⁹*Antapodosis*, 6, 4 (as above, note 82), 155, lines 29–33. The gifts specified are clearly regionally specific: "nine excellent cuirasses, seven excellent shields with gilded bosses, some swords, lances, spits, and four *corzimasia* [eunuchs]." We know that in 953 John of Gorze's embassy to Cordoba on behalf of Otto I relied heavily on the services of experienced Verdun merchants, one of whom later helped to extricate John after he had been detained by 'Abd al-Rahmān III for three years: *Vita Iohannis Gorziensis*, §116–17, ed. G. H. Pertz, in *MGH, SS*, vol. 4 (Hanover, 1841), 370, 375–76. On this embassy see K. J. Leyser, "Ends and Means in Liutprand of Cremona," *ByzF* 13 (1988): 119–43, esp. 134.

¹¹⁰The absence of a professional diplomatic class meant that even a "tourist" could be enlisted for the purpose. Thus the Moroccan Ibn Baṭṭūṭa was charged by the sultan of Delhi with bearing a huge present to the Chinese emperor: 100 thoroughbred horses and the same number of both male slaves and "Hindu singing- and dancing-girls," as well as silks, cottons, and robes of honor "from the Sultan's own wardrobe and ten caps also worn by him." See *The Travels of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa* (as in note 31), 4:773–74.

¹¹¹The text is edited by M. Canard, "Une lettre de Muhammad ibn Ṭughj al-Ihšsīs, émir d'Égypte à l'empereur Romain Lecapène," *AnnIEOAlg* 3 (1936): 189–90, and trans. in Vasiliev-Canard (as above, note 12), 213.

¹¹²*Le Livre de l'impôt foncier (Kitāb el Kharāj)*, trans. E. Fagnan (Paris, 1921), 291.

safe-conduct normally obtainable only from the ruler and, once in his presence, underwent the rites in which gift-giving preceded negotiations toward their objective. These obtained whether the visit was to a comparatively backward country like that of the Saqāl-iba, whose king paid tribute to the Khazars, but, as Ibn Faḍlān notes, still had the right to choose one slave from every ten brought in by Rus' merchants,¹¹³ or a sophisticated court like that of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III. Here, according to Ibn Ḥayyān, the caliph had his first pick of imported goods, but in at least one instance he acquired the "major part" of the satin and purple (silk?) being offered for sale by the *malfatānīn*, Amalfitan traders who arrived in Cordoba in March 942; the balance was sold to dealers in the Spanish capital.¹¹⁴

The idea that gifts and commodities were often interchangeable likewise finds support in the manner in which they were distributed. Among the extraordinarily diverse offerings presented by Michael VI to al-Mustansir in A.H. 444/A.D. 1053, the *Kitāb al-Hadāyā* distinguishes between the fine articles said to have arrived on a Byzantine warship and the heavy objects consigned to a cargo boat.¹¹⁵ We may presume that vessels of this second type were more usually employed: the lighter weight and normally smaller bulk of luxurious items implies that commercial wares traveled with them in order to make up economical shiploads.¹¹⁶ In fact, this is attested by the *cause célèbre* that was the loss to Genoese and Pisan pirates of a Venetian ship carrying Greek and Syrian merchants, as well as "equos et mulos et alia animalia ad venationem pertinentia et omni-genas pretiosas merces," sent by Saladin to Isaac II Angelos in 1192.¹¹⁷ The emperor's protest to the Genoese authorities, complete with claim for compensation and threat of reprisal against their compatriots in Constantinople, likewise recounts the gifts with which Isaac responded to Saladin's gesture. These were sent together with goods belonging to his brother, Alexios, and Byzantine merchants. The total value of the cargo, the

¹¹³Canard, "Ibn Faḍlān" (as above, note 11), 115.

¹¹⁴*Al-Muqtabis V* (as above, note 2), 322, trans. Viguera and Corriente, 358–59. In August of the same year, the Amalfitans returned, this time in the company of an ambassador from Sardinia, offering ingots of pure silver and again satin. The practice of "first fruits" is echoed in Arab legend, as in *The Thousand and One Nights*, trans. N.J. Dawood (Harmondsworth, 1955), 119, where the "choicest and most precious articles" brought by Sinbad are given to Mahjaran, king of an unnamed island, in return for which the sailor receives "priceless treasures."

¹¹⁵*Book of Gifts*, 110, §85. The items listed include slave boys and girls, a menagerie of birds, all white (the official color of the Fāṭimids), huge bears that played musical instruments, dogs, and "one thousand seven hundred lead-sealed bottles containing special fine drinks used by the king and kept in his cellar." The envoy responsible for their conveyance reported that the value of each [bottle] in Byzantium was 7 dinars.

¹¹⁶C. Cahen, "Douanes et commerce dans ports méditerranéens de l'Égypte médiéval d'après le *Minhadj* d'al-Makhzūmi," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 7 (1964): 234. For a shipment of silk from a Constantinopolitan *vestioprates* to Egypt, carried by a Venetian merchantman in 1111, see Jacoby, "Silk in Western Byzantium," 496.

¹¹⁷*Nuova serie di documenti sulle relazioni di Genova coll'impero bizantino*, ed. G. Bertolotto (Genoa, 1895), no. XII, 450; MM 3:no. VI, 38. Earlier in the same document, but possibly describing another gift of Saladin's, the sultan is said to have sent horses, aloes wood, balsam, ambergris, *blattia*, and twenty-seven saddles studded with precious stones and pearls. Whatever the relation between these two catalogues, they represent at most two stages in a sequence of exchanges that included Saladin's present to Isaac of an elephant, an aloe tree with green roots and branches (said to be more precious than the box of aloes wood included in the gift, presumably because with it the emperor would henceforth have his own source of supply), and 20,000 bezants. For the full list see the *Chronicon Magni Presbyteri*, s.a. 1189, ed. W. Wattenbach, MGH, SS, vol. 17 (Hanover, 1861), 511–12, and, for the political framework, C. M. Brand, "The Byzantines and Saladin, 1184–1192: Opponents of the Third Crusade," *Speculum* 37 (1962): 167–81.

emperor indicates, was 96,000 hyperpera and 566 nomismata, of which the merchants' share alone amounted to 39,000 hyperpera and 193 nomismata.¹¹⁸

Even if the numbers are inflated, they suggest both the commutability of commodities and gifts and their economic significance. Generally, nonetheless, we have scant way to measure the effect of such transactions upon either the economies of the countries that produced the goods involved or those that received them. Yet some of the reports that we do possess in this domain are worth mentioning, if only because their very sparsity presupposes that, in aggregate, the impact of exchanges of this sort was vastly larger. As if to demonstrate the point, a Byzantine ambassador, called Tarath (Tarasios?) b. al-Layth and identified as a *batriq* (*patrikios*) and son of a "king of Rûm" by the Khatîb al-Baghdādî, is said to have asked his host, the caliph al-Mahdî (A.H. 158–169/A.D. 775–785), to lend him half a million dirhams to establish a factory later known as the Mills of the Patrikios; the caliph was promised a return on investment of the same sum every year.¹¹⁹ Despite the inherent implausibility of this bit of palaeocapitalism, the Khatîb says that al-Mahdî advanced the Greek twice the amount requested and, implying that the venture was a stunning success, ordered that a share of the income should be sent every year to Constantinople. This pension, we are told, the *patrikios* continued to receive until his death.

Like exports of human acumen those of goods also have stories to tell, although these may say at least as much about the society in which they originated as about that in which they ended up. Thus the production of the supposedly peerless silk *pallio* depicting the life of St. Lawrence and sent to Genoa in 1261 by Michael VIII is put into some perspective by the pearl-bedecked "samite" altar cloth that Michael offered to Pope Gregory X a few years later.¹²⁰ No longer extant, it is described in an inventory as depicting an image of Christ and, at his feet, the Virgin enthroned amid saints to whom the pope presents the emperor. Echoing the motif of the emperor's introduction to the elect, the lost cloth is no less important in that it witnesses to the production of elaborate silks, and especially those made ad hoc, well into the Palaiologan period. And much the same may be true of fine gold- and silver-smithery. In a famous passage, Pachymeres has a great deal of fun at the expense of the Mongol commander Nogay, to whom Michael sent a variety of expensively adorned headgear and costumes which the khan rejected on the grounds that they would not ward off lightning bolts or prevent headaches.¹²¹ Overlooked in this orientalist fable is the datum that the gift included gold and silver cups which, along with other finery, evidently continued to be manufactured in an age supposed by many historians to be one of straitened circumstances.

I shall return in a moment to the impact on domestic industrial production of diplomatic gifts but, for now, there are other effects of ambassadorial exchange to be considered. Quite apart from the infusion of capital represented by the ransom paid for prison-

¹¹⁸Bertolotto, 450; MM 2:39.

¹¹⁹See the translation by J. Lassner, *The Topography of Baghdad in the Early Middle Ages* (Detroit, 1970), 75–76, with commentary on 184.

¹²⁰E. Molinier, "Inventaire du trésor du Saint-Siège sous Boniface VIII (1295)," *BEC* 46 (1885): 18–19, no. 811. This *pallium* was first connected with the one in Genoa by P. Schreiner, "Zwei Denkmäler aus der frühen Paläologenzeit: Ein Bildnis Michaels VIII und der Genueser Pallio," in *Festschrift für Klaus Wessel zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. M. Restle (Munich, 1988), 249–58, and associated by him with the Unionist negotiations of 1274.

¹²¹*Relations historiques*, ed. A. Failler, 2 vols. (Paris, 1984), 2:447, line 26–449, line 11.

ers of war, and considered above, the very preparations for such negotiations could entail vast investment. The most detailed information that we have on such a reception concerns the mission to Baghdad of two envoys from Constantine VII (in A.H. 305/A.D. 917–918) and derives from at least four Arabic and Syriac sources. The short, almost contemporary account of ‘Arib, the continuator of Ṭabarī, concentrates on the quantity of gold and silver objects, jewels, and carpets laid out to astonish the Greeks, as did the “elephants, giraffes, lions, and panthers”¹²² paraded on the banks of the Tigris. None of these was necessarily acquired for the occasion, although the robes of honor, including scarves of heavy brocade presented to the ambassadors (along with 20,000 dirhams given to each)¹²³ by the caliph, must surely have been new. In the *Book of Gifts*, however, the narrative begins long before their reception by al-Muqtadir and dwells on the Dār Sā‘id, the palace prepared for them, and the Dār al-Būstān, the “Garden House,” in the grand audience hall of which they had their audience with Ibn al-Furāt, the vizier. He had ordered superb furnishings to be spread and beautiful drapes to be hung, then “requested even more furnishings, drapes, and carpets, the cost of which amounted to thirty thousand dinars.”¹²⁴ There is no point in rehearsing the description of the palaces traversed by the ambassadors, the armies in satin uniforms, or the menageries that they witnessed, for these other expenses are not quantified. Rather, in light of the richness of the textual tradition and the unparalleled length of the passage devoted to this embassy, it will suffice to accept the spirit if not the letter of ‘Arib’s declaration that “its like had never before been seen.”¹²⁵

It is far from the banks of the Tigris to those of the Volga, but à propos of furnishings, Ibn Faḍlān’s report on the Saqāliba suggests a further point that needs to be made in any discussion of the economics of diplomacy. After he bestowed on their king the *khila’* that he had brought from Baghdad, the ‘Abbāsīd envoy notes that this ruler sat in his tent on a throne covered with Byzantine brocade; the same is true of the Bulgar king’s throne, although his tent, large enough to contain a thousand persons, is, in addition, said to be carpeted with Armenian rugs.¹²⁶ Now, to identify their places of origin on the basis of the epithets applied in medieval texts to fabrics and furnishings is always risky. But the repetition and specificity of these descriptions, if they are not purely conventional, allow only two interpretations: either these textiles were gifts presented by an emissary earlier than Ibn Faḍlān or they were commodities obtained in trade. Whichever is the case, the functional overlap between these categories requires that the received distinction between commercial and noncommercial exchange be reconsidered.

¹²² Vasiliev-Canard (as above, note 12), 61–62. For another textual tradition, see *ibid.*, 252.

¹²³ By the time of Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1257), in *ibid.*, 169–71, this amount had grown to 50,000 dirhams.

¹²⁴ *Book of Gifts*, 148–55, esp. 149; ‘Arib (in Vasiliev-Canard, 56–60, esp. 57) gives the same figure for the new accoutrements. The account in the *Kitāb al-Hadāyā* is clearly based on the early 11th-century description of the event by Miskawayh (in Vasiliev-Canard, 66–69). For an equally detailed account of the mission, see *The Chronography of Gregory Abū’l Faraj*, trans. E. A. Wallis Budge, 2 vols. (London, 1932), 1:156–57.

¹²⁵ Assertions of this sort, although clearly *topoi*, still have their uses; since economic history cannot be confined to the history of quantities, the task is to recognize in them indications of more than hyperbole. On occasion they are associated with precise information of obvious historical value. One such is the comment of al-Mufaḍḍal, cited on p. 261 above, made in relation to the number of robes of honor offered to al-Muẓaffar’s senior officials.

¹²⁶ Canard, “Ibn Faḍlān” (as above, note 11), 88, 103.

Nowhere is the consonance between goods and gifts made clearer than in the famous story of the trap set by Mu'āwiya I (A.H. 41–60/A.D. 661–680) to kidnap an unnamed *patrikios* who had insulted an Arab prisoner. To whet his appetite, the Umayyad caliph sent the Byzantine magnificent presents—“a chalice of cut glass, scents, jewels, all sorts of rare objects and splendid clothing,” in the tenth-century account of al-Mas'ūdī¹²⁷—on a Tyrian ship. When the *patrikios* had been hooked, he requested the merchant to bring him “a Susanjird carpet with cushions and pillows,” asserting that no matter how high their price he would pay it. Returning with these goods, the Tyrian lured the offending dignitary on board and carried him off to Damascus. Even if this is a later invention intended to delight a Muslim audience with tales of Greek rapacity, it nicely epitomizes an enduring Arab understanding of the enemy's weaknesses.¹²⁸ For our purposes, moreover, the story exemplifies the currency in Constantinople of garments from Syria—the striped cloaks, goods of iridescent silk, and βαγδαδίκια—purveyed by the *prandiopratai* of the *Book of the Eparch* to the *archontes*, the satisfaction of whose wishes extended to both dyestuffs and perfumes.¹²⁹

I am arguing, of course, that perceived needs promoted both the desirability of gifts and the impulse to trade: the activities of donors, recipients, merchants, and those who bought from them merely define specific points along curves of desire that pursued the same course and frequently intersected; both describe what Keynes called “the propensity to consume.” One economic moment of their crossing was the stimulus that the readiness to offer luxurious presents lent to the industries of art. Such incentives are rarely visible in the texts, concerned as they are primarily with the identity and circumstances of the giver or (less often) the impact of the gift upon its *destinataire* and the results that are said to flow from the act in question. Yet the report of “Bar Hebraeus” on the way in which ‘Abd al-Rahmān, ambassador of Tegüder, the Mongol ruler of Iran (1281–84), to the Mamlūk sultan of Egypt, assembled in Tabriz “handicraftsmen of all kind, jewelers and sewers [i.e., weavers], and others, and . . . made everything to a royal pattern”¹³⁰ allows us to see the mechanisms by which this and other sumptuous gifts came into being.

¹²⁷ *Les Prairies d'or*, ed. and trans. C. Barbier de Meynard and P. de Courteille, 9 vols. (Paris, 1861–77), 8:75–88. See the revised edition by C. Pellat (Paris, 1971), §3202–12, and trans. P. Lunde and C. Stone, *The Meadows of Gold. The Abbasids by Mas'udi* (London, 1989), 320–24.

¹²⁸ The story ends with the merchant returning the patrician to Constantinople not only with the goods he had sought but with gifts from the caliph to the emperor.

¹²⁹ *Das Eparchenbuch Leons des Weisen*, ed. J. Koder (Vienna, 1991), 94. That such commodities moved no less in the other direction is indicated by the commercial treaty of 969 between Byzantium and the Syrian emirate of Aleppo. Preserved in the 13th-century history of Kamāl al-Din known as the *Zubdat al-halab min ta'rikh Ḥalab*, ed. S. Zakkar, 2 vols. (Damascus, 1997), 1:167–68, it includes provisions for a Byzantine customs officer, seated beside an Arab counterpart, in Aleppo to assess levies on imports of gold, silver, brocade (= *buziūn*, despite the prohibitions repeatedly specified in the *Book of the Prefect* 4, §1, 3, 8; 5, §2; 6), raw silk, garments of this material (*sundus*), precious stones, etc. On the context of the treaty, see M. Canard, “Les relations politiques et sociales entre Byzance et les Arabes,” *DOP* 18 (1964): 48–56. The view that in the mid-11th century, when Nasir-i Khosrau visited Egypt, this country and especially the city of Tinnis excelled in the production of fine linens is implicit in this traveler's anecdote that “the ruler of Byzantium once sent a message to the sultan . . . that he would exchange a hundred cities of his realm” for that of Tinnis alone. See *Nasēr-e Khosraw's Book of Travels (Safarnāma)*, trans. W. M. Thackston (New York, 1986), 39.

¹³⁰ *Chronography* (as above, note 124), 468. The text suggests that the objects ordered by ‘Abd al-Rahmān supplemented the “large amount of money from the royal treasury of the Mongols, and precious stones, and marvellous pearls, and gold, and silver, and apparel, and bales of stuff (i.e. brocades) wherein much gold was woven.” T. T. Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange in the Mongol Empire. A Cultural History of Islamic Textiles* (Cambridge, 1997), 34, suggests that at least the last items in this list were created ad hoc.

Seven centuries earlier the golden couch prepared for the khagan, and a fortiori the silver vessels and embroidered textiles agreed by Maurice as annual tribute to the Avars,¹³¹ had offered analogous incentives to Byzantine craftsmanship.

At such moments the division between economic and noneconomic exchange becomes questionable. Whether a ruler's gifts consisted of commercially obtained goods, as were probably the Indian spices (cloves, cassia, etc.) that Priskos conveyed to the ambassadors of the Avar khagan,¹³² and the furs that Andronikos II sent to the Mamlūk al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalā'ūn in 1302,¹³³ or articles manufactured in state factories, as in the case of the elaborate silks, linens, and cotton cloths offered four years later by this sultan to James II of Aragon,¹³⁴ their acquisition and production served as economic stimuli to traders and craftsmen. Many diplomatic presents involved articles of both kinds. Thus Constantine IX's gift to al-Mustansir in 1046 included not only "a hundred [and] fifty beautiful she-mules and selected horses" but also brocade saddles for each, as well as fifty mules carrying fifty pairs of boxes, covered with fifty pieces of silk thin brocade." In turn these boxes are said to have contained "a hundred golden vessels of various kinds inlaid with enamel" and a great variety of fabrics, some made up into turbans, girdles, and hangings.¹³⁵ Even if these last items issued from "palace workshops,"¹³⁶ it is clear that the domestic impact of this body of production far transcended the emperor's immediate environment.

It is in the nature of our sources to personalize such presents rather than to see them as performances having macroeconomic effects. In doing so they also seem to emphasize discontinuities in production and consumption: Romanos I, Romanos IV, and Michael VIII Palaiologos loom as exceptional figures in the gift lists, serial givers whose generosity is treated as anomalous. More likely than that they represent instances that happen to be recorded, it might be nearer the truth to suppose that the gifts of emperors, caliphs, and others were normal behavior, the very constancy of which both promoted trade in precious substances, giving employment to thousands of artisans over the course of centuries, keeping craft skills alive, and furnishing a currency that was no less *de rigueur* in international and interregional exchanges than transfers of specie. Perhaps a greater danger than exaggerating their impact lies in underestimating the size and frequency of such exports, continuing as they did from the fifth through the fifteenth century.¹³⁷

¹³¹ See 247, 254, above.

¹³² Theoph. Sim. (as above, note 14), 267, line 8–268, line 3, trans. Whitby, 196–97.

¹³³ For the sources, see Dölger, *Regesten*, no. 2240.

¹³⁴ For this exchange, which included balsam, incense, and crossbows, see A. S. Atiyah, *Egypt and Aragon: Embassies and Diplomatic Correspondence between A.D. 1300 and 1310*, AbhKM 23 (Leipzig, 1938), 7, 20–25. This early 14th-century body of production falls within the chronological framework of W. Sombart, *Luxury and Capitalism* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1967), who maintained that the demand for such luxuries expressed by aristocracies old and new was the driving force behind the expansion of early capitalist trade, industry, and finance.

¹³⁵ These formed part of the present the valuation of which in the *Book of Gifts* is cited in note 63 above.

¹³⁶ Such institutions have an enduring place in the scholarship on middle Byzantine crafts. Yet apart from the attested workshops producing silk and jewelry (cf. *ODB* 1:774–75, s.v. Factories, imperial), their existence is largely unsubstantiated. For a critique of the concept, see A. Cutler, *The Hand of the Master. Craftsmanship, Ivory, and Society in Byzantium, 9th–11th Centuries* (Princeton, N.J., 1994), 186–87, 233.

¹³⁷ A crude index to this activity is provided by Dölger's *Regesten* which, over the course of the period from 565 to 1453, note at least 110 such transfers, usually baldly summarized as "mit Geschenken." These represent, of course, only the instances reported in the sources on which Dölger drew. It is also worth observing that there is no necessary correlation between exports and the relative strength of a particular economy. Contemplating the recent economic growth of China, the editor of an east Russian newspaper, *Amurskaia*

driven less by internal political conditions and economic “downturns” than by external threats to the empire.

Be that as it may, there are at least two other reasons why gifts and gift-exchange merit inclusion in the purview of the economic historian. First, there is the remarkable, if unremarked, parallelism between constituent parts of diplomatic presents and objects of trade in the eastern Mediterranean. Beyond the slaves, precious metalwork, gems, perfumes (musk, civet, vetiver), and spices that were the stock-in-trade of such exchanges, rare woods, such as that of aloes which recur in the gift lists,¹³⁸ appear in both commercial treaties and documents that record prohibitions on their exportation.¹³⁹ Ivory, virtually invisible in Byzantine inventories after the mid-eleventh century, is recorded among the luxuries dispersed from the Fāṭimid treasuries¹⁴⁰ and at the same time noted as hugely available as a raw material in the markets of Fustāt.¹⁴¹ Above all, textiles, both “by the yard” and in the form of clothing, have pride of place in both Muslim and Greek presents. It can hardly be an accident that the eleventh century, “the golden age of the overseas trade on the Islamic side of the Mediterranean,”¹⁴² is also the period of the highest incidence of gifts listed in the *Kitāb al-Hadāyā*. This convergence, however, is more than a matter of chronology. Itemized as single garments or as ensembles (*hulla*, *hulltāhu*) in the gift lists, this was also the way they were traded, given at weddings, and transmitted by parents as precious heirlooms to their children.¹⁴³

These patterns of consumption, then, may have more to tell us about cultural distribution than the rich body of information that we possess, at least for the Muslim world, regarding systems of production.¹⁴⁴ In any case they provide a broader base than courtly examples (of which we know most) of the “shop window” phenomenon, the mechanism by which gifts presented to and displayed by potentates provoked demand in quantities that could be satisfied only by trade. It would be excessive to say that gifts were a *sine qua non* of commerce, but they certainly whetted the appetite not only for textiles but for all the other goods catalogued with almost monotonous repetition in chronicles, privi-

Pravda, is quoted in the *New York Times* (20 July 1999, 1) as saying “For China, it is not profitable for us to be strong. The weaker we are, the more they can get from us.”

¹³⁸E.g., *Book of Gifts*, 61, §1; 80–82, §39. See also note 115 above.

¹³⁹Thus the agreement between Basil II and al-ʿAzīz (note 26 above) lifted the ban on precious woods originally imposed by John Tzimiskēs in 971. Prized mainly for its fragrance, aloes wood was also used as a material for fine carving. A “decorated” cross of this material (ξυλαλώη) is specified among the gifts of Thomas Komnenos Prealympos (Preljubović), despot of Epiros, to the Great Lavra in 1375 (*Actes de Lavra*, ed. P. Lemerle et al. [Paris, 1979], 107, line 8). Hārūn ibn Yahyā, a 9th-century Syrian captive taken to Constantinople, describes the altar of Hagia Sophia as “a block of aloes wood encrusted with pearls and rubies.” See M. Izeddin, “Un prisonnier arabe à Byzance au IXe siècle,” *REI* 15 (1941–46): 51.

¹⁴⁰*Book of Gifts*, 234, §381; 235, §390.

¹⁴¹*Nas̄r-e Khosraw’s Book of Travels* (as above, note 129), 53.

¹⁴²S. D. Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders* (Princeton, N.J., 1973), 73.

¹⁴³*Ibid.*, 74. This status derived, of course, from their cost. Commenting on the 60 dinars cited as the price for one such outfit in a letter of ca. 1010, Goitein observes that on this sum a family (of unspecified size) could live for about three years. Further substantiating the consonance of gifts and goods, he tells the story of a traveler from Qayrawān (Tunisia) who, having forgotten to bring his wife the ensemble that she desired, immediately sought to amend his oversight by means of “the very first caravan setting out” (167).

¹⁴⁴Al-Maqqarī, *Analectes* (as above, note 40), 1:102, tells of the Christian ships tied up at Almeria (Al-Mariya) in Spain ready to carry the products of its eight hundred looms weaving *ṭirāzī* garments of silk, and its one thousand looms producing *siqlātūn*, *ʿattabī*, and other stuffs, to their own lands.

leges granted to merchants, and gift lists. If emulation has become a cardinal principle of social anthropology, it has long been understood by economists as the engine driving what they call the multiplier effect. In the absence of any full medieval account of the process, we may turn once again to fable, to the story of Sinbad the merchant who introduced the saddle and other trappings to a land rich in horses but ignorant of the means by which they could be ridden with ease. Having taught a carpenter to make a wooden saddle frame and a blacksmith to forge a bit and a pair of stirrups, he applied this equipment to one of the royal horses and was rewarded with “precious gifts and a large sum of money” from the king. The vizier begged Sinbad to make one for him, with the result that “[i]t was not long before every courtier and noble in the kingdom became the owner of a handsome saddle” and Sinbad “the richest man on the island.”¹⁴⁵

GIFTS AND GIFT EXCHANGE IN ECONOMIC HISTORY AND THEORY

The behavior of Sinbad and those whom he served is a perfect example of the classical economic doctrine that the motive to produce things is the desire to exchange them for other goods and that this supply in and of itself creates demand and thereby stimulates further exchange. But Say's law, as this nineteenth-century notion is now called, is hardly useful to our investigation in that it is based upon the belief (still essential in Marx's thinking) that the value of something is the reason for its exchange¹⁴⁶ rather than that it is this exchange that stamps an object with value. The validity of this counterproposition, first set out to my knowledge by Georg Simmel,¹⁴⁷ is supported by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's remarks about the amount of silk that he encountered on his diplomatic mission: a luxury elsewhere, in China it was so plentiful that “[i]f it were not for the merchants [trading it] it would have no value.”¹⁴⁸ The Arab traveler was, of course, observing the movement of commodities in a field of activity that today would be described as economic, a viewpoint that seems to set them apart from the transfer of goods—bracelets, necklaces, and, above all, armshells—that for Malinowski and, after him, Mauss and a host of other anthropologists, constituted the *kula* of the Western Pacific. This trade Mauss described as “carried on in a noble fashion, apparently in a disinterested and modest way. It is distinguished carefully from the mere economic exchange of useful goods.”¹⁴⁹ Its “nobility” is said to derive from the ethical climate in which it circulated, a system that institutionalized the obligation to give, to receive, and, after a decent interval, to reciprocate the initial gift, all the while ignoring, as befitted “primitive” or “archaic” societies, its monetary value.

The question now is the extent to which this model is applicable to the gifts that

¹⁴⁵*The Thousand and One Nights* (as above, note 114), 140.

¹⁴⁶J. B. Say, *Traité d'économie politique* (Paris, 1841).

¹⁴⁷G. Simmel, *Die Philosophie des Geldes* (Leipzig, 1907), trans. T. Bottomore, D. Frisby, and K. Mangelberg as *The Philosophy of Money*, 2d ed. (London, 1990). An insightful study of the implications of Simmel's ideas is to be found in A. Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value” in his *Social Life of Things* (as above, note 23), 3–63.

¹⁴⁸*The Travels of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa* (as above, note 31), 4:890. This theoretical aperçu was based on empirical observation. In the previous paragraph he had observed that “You will see an important merchant whose wealth is beyond reckoning wearing a tunic of coarse cotton.”

¹⁴⁹*The Gift*, trans. Halls (as above, note 3), 22. For more recent understandings of the system, see Godelier, *The Enigma of the Gift* (as above, note 3), 78–95, and the papers by various hands collected as *The Kula: New Perspectives on Massim Exchange*, ed. J. W. Leach and E. Leach (Cambridge, 1983).

moved within and especially between the economies that are the subject of this paper. It is not enough to disown its relevance to Muslim or Byzantine societies on the ground that their economies were neither primitive nor archaic. Even if the texts (and especially the Greek texts) at our disposal present what Pierre Bourdieu called “sincere fictions,” making it difficult for us to see the economy that they inhabited “as an economy, i.e., as a system governed by the laws of interested calculation, competition, or exploitation,”¹⁵⁰ much of the evidence discussed above not only allows us to reject the notion that gifts represent disinterested activity, but, upon analysis, requires that we recognize the calculative dimension of so-called noncommercial exchange. The extent to which the early medieval economy was monetized¹⁵¹ is immaterial to this understanding; Grierson’s argument that gifts (and theft) were the principal means by which precious goods were distributed still makes it easier to grasp, first, the reason why at least Muslim chronicles and treatises put so much emphasis on presents and, second, why, in both these and their Byzantine equivalents, gold and silver coin figures so often in accounts of such transfers. The prominence of specie underscores another reason why the Maussian account is less than useful as an analogy. In his interpretation, the reciprocal movement of objects made from shells was essentially a religious activity disguised as a seemingly economic operation.¹⁵² By contrast, the material worth of the wares, processed or unprocessed, that traveled in several directions among caliphs, emperors, and their immediate subalterns was clearly their primary aspect. This is manifest not only in the textiles that did duty for capital, as we have seen, but in contemporary readings of gifts the monetary value of which is reported, as in the case of Constantine IX’s present to al-Mustanşir,¹⁵³ even before its individual components are itemized.

Whatever one’s stance toward the economy of our own time, it is evident from such appraisals that that of the medieval Islamic and Greek worlds was not differentiated by rejecting monetary value—Marx’s “radical leveler that . . . does away with all distinctions”—as the yardstick by which gifts were measured. Far from disavowing interest in the material worth of presents, claims that they were unprecedented or unique were

¹⁵⁰Bourdieu, *Outline* (as above, note 3), 171–72. I owe the term “calculative dimension” later in this sentence to A. Appadurai.

¹⁵¹Grierson, “Commerce” (as above, note 30). Recent archaeological finds, and especially the evidence of coin hoards, suggest that this point of view requires qualification. This is not the place to discuss the issue at length, but attention must be paid to the work of T. S. Noonan, much of it conveniently assembled in his collection, *The Islamic World, Russia and the Vikings 759–900* (Aldershot-Brookfield, Vt., 1998). A representative statement is his conclusion (first published in 1984 and repr. *ibid.*, 152–53) that “the thousands and thousands of dirhams imported into Eastern and Northern Europe between the early ninth and early eleventh centuries were overwhelmingly the product of Eastern European trade.” For the North, see also the papers by W. Duczko and T. Talvio in *Byzantium and Islam in Scandinavia. Acts of a Symposium at Uppsala University June 15–16, 1996*, ed. E. Piltz (Jonsö, 1998), 77–84, 107–115; for western Europe, M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce, A.D. 300–900* (in press).

The implications of such a revision are enormous, not least for cultural and art historians. Thus, e.g., the gold coins of Offa, king of Mercia (757–796), on which the only non-Arabizing forms are his name and title, and which have long been recognized as imitations of the ‘Abbāsid dinar, may well have been struck as much for commercial as for political reasons.

¹⁵²The source of Mauss’s error is pointed out by M. Sahlins, “The Spirit of the Gift. *Une explication de texte*,” in *Échanges et communications. Mélanges offerts à Claude Lévi-Strauss à l’occasion de son 60ème anniversaire*, ed. J. Pouillon and P. Maranda (The Hague-Paris, 1970), 998–1012.

¹⁵³See note 63 above.

clearly rhetorical devices designed to emphasize this very aspect of their nature. And if this emphasis is seen to impugn the supposedly “non-exploitative, innocent, and even transparent”¹⁵⁴ world of gift exchange, it does so only in the minds of those who have constructed an ideology of the gift in antithesis to that said to be characteristic of capitalism. The essential contrast here is not that between medieval and modern markets but that between the gift which, in modern as well as medieval times, momentarily pretends to ignore the scarcity, and therefore the value, of a good and the commercial transaction which frankly acknowledges these qualities. One importance of the *Kitāb al-Hadāyā* and its like is that, for medieval as for modern readers, they pierce the veil of this pretense. In other words, they oblige us to recognize the economic role of diplomatic offerings and in so doing restore gifts to their place in economic history.

It is this place that demands our attention if only because it both complements and departs from the most authoritative account of “outward” and “inward flows”—the pattern of payments and subsidies made by and to the Byzantine state.¹⁵⁵ Michael Hendy observed the much smaller sums involved in such *dōra* in the middle and later periods, as against the era when, in the fifth and sixth centuries, the Byzantines had bought off the Huns, Persians, and Avars. The record of material gifts scarcely differs in this latter respect: before the tenth century, Maurice’s reign is one of the few times in which a consistent pattern of material offerings can be recognized unmistakably in the texts. Yet it is precisely in the light of the later decline in monetary transfers noted by Hendy that we can observe that if in terms of absolute value the worth of Byzantine gifts to Muslims was similarly reduced, their value relative to transfers as a whole greatly increased. Even if the presents of Romanos I and Constantine IX, richly documented in the *Kitāb al-Hadāyā*,¹⁵⁶ are not entirely explicable as signs of political and military weakness, those of Romanos IV, Michael VIII, and Manuel II¹⁵⁷ cannot be interpreted otherwise. Yet long before these clearly symptomatic gestures, the economic picture that I have tried to sketch is already complicated by the interpretations placed on presents in the sources. Clouding the view that the offer of a gift must be a mark of either superiority or feebleness is the diverse significance attached to such behavior by both Greeks and Muslims. The labeling of tribute as *dōra*, the subordination of the emperor implicit in al-Tabarī’s version of the workmen and materials sent to al-Walīd, the *patrikios* lured to Baghdad with presents, the overt contempt for Nogay expressed by Pachymeres, and other stories that we have considered all bespeak in their various ways the values added to the bestowal and reception of gifts.

The antagonistic spirit of reports of this sort might be regarded as representative of the difference between “traditional” and “modern” economies where the rational operation of the latter is fondly supposed to preclude the attachment of values to acts of exchange and the commodities that these involve. But in a less idealized view both precapi-

¹⁵⁴ I borrow the quotation and this part of my argument from M. Bloch and J. Parry, “Introduction: Money and the Morality of Exchange,” in *Money and the Morality of Exchange*, ed. J. Parry and M. Bloch (Cambridge, 1989), 1–32, esp. 7–9. They, in turn, acknowledge dependence on a review by M. Sahlins in *American Anthropologist* 64 (1962): 1068.

¹⁵⁵ Hendy, *Studies* (as above, note 64), 257–79, with occasional reference to gifts (268–71).

¹⁵⁶ See 245, 251, 259, 261 above.

¹⁵⁷ See 257, 264, 266 above.

talist and capitalist markets can be seen to display competitive instincts that are parallel if not directly akin. Moreover, since decisions to give and receive, if not the judgments visited upon these gifts, were made at the highest levels, it follows that neither the presents from and to caliphs and emperors, nor the rarity of the substances that these at once celebrated and purported to ignore, were determined by the entire societies over which they presided. Even if, as we have seen, the harvesting or manufacture of commodities could stimulate industries that supplied the court with luxuries,¹⁵⁸ beyond the level of their production, golden couches, say, and rock-crystal ewers would have had little impact on the majority of people living at the subsistence level.¹⁵⁹

Another way of looking at this division of interest within the societies with which we have been concerned is to express it in terms of “two related but separate transactional orders”:¹⁶⁰ on the one hand, Muslim and Greek élites that concerned themselves with exchanges understood to reproduce the long-term political, social, and even cosmic order,¹⁶¹ ends ostensibly furthered by the conveyance of prestigious goods; on the other, their subject populations inhabiting an arena of short-term transactions characterized for the most part by individual acquisition.¹⁶² Both groups were engaged in competition, but, whereas for the second class this could be a condition of survival, for the first it was often laden, as we have seen, with ideological significance. To the extent that gifts of luxuries can be dissociated from commercial exchange—a distinction the absolute nature of which I have questioned above—they represent a source of information about the interpretation of economic and symbolic capital more eloquent than records of routine transactions in goods that were regarded as necessities, or at least as staples, in the medieval Mediterranean.

This interpenetration comes about when, as in the case of lapis lazuli,¹⁶³ goods are

¹⁵⁸See 268–69 above.

¹⁵⁹I know of no evidence that, unlike natural disasters such as famines and plagues, the gift-giving habits of the Byzantine administration affected the lives of the *misthioi* or dependent peasantry. The most likely beneficiaries of these practices would be the state or privately owned factories (on which see p. 266 above) accustomed to producing gifts. These would profit from what economists call “increasing returns to scale”: once the artisans and materials were in place, the marginal cost of production (i.e., the manufacture of subsequent versions in a series of luxury objects) would decline markedly. Unfortunately, as I point out in note 136, we know next to nothing of such workshops.

¹⁶⁰Bloch and Parry, “Introduction,” 24.

¹⁶¹For the last dimension, beyond the purview of the present paper, see esp. Godelier, *The Enigma of the Gift* (as above, note 3).

¹⁶²A modern economist would put this differently, but to the same effect, with an appeal to the Engel curve, which demonstrates that the share of a household’s expenditure on necessities is inversely related to its income or some other measure of its total resources. On this, see M. Friedman, *A Theory of the Consumption Function* (Princeton, N.J., 1957).

¹⁶³In addition to the precious goods (fragrant woods, spices, textiles, etc.) discussed above, it is remarkable that lapis lazuli, mentioned rarely in the gift lists perhaps because of its rarity (but cf. *Book of Gifts*, 2 §1; 75, §29; and 234, §383) and prized in both Byzantium and Islam for the color that it lent to inscriptions, was available for purchase in both Tyre and Qayrawān in the 11th century. The merchant who records this (see Goitein, *Letters*, 95, 111) reports that it “sells here well because only a little of it is on the market.” L. James, *Light and Colour in Byzantine Art* (Oxford, 1996), 30, suggests that in the classical era the only known source for lapis lazuli was Afghanistan. At least one Arab source, Abū Bakr, writing in 1068, reports that in the country of the Ketama, beyond Qayrawān, lapis of excellent quality was to be found (as well as iron and copper mines). See W. McG. de Slane, “Description de l’Afrique septentrionale par el-Bekri,” *JA* (December 1858): 498.

transformed into gifts or otherwise perceived as entities that signal their removal from an initial commercial state. This process became well understood in the last quarter of the twentieth century when formulated as the conversion of commodities into signs.¹⁶⁴ But in the richly developed symbologies of medieval societies signs could also become commodities, particularly if we understand the term broadly enough to include religious objects used instrumentally in pursuit of political and economic ends.¹⁶⁵ A classic Byzantine instance is the relic of the True Cross treasured in the Great Palace at the time of Alexios I Komnenos. This possession allowed him early in his reign to give a portion of it to Henry IV when he sought the western emperor's alliance against the Normans. In 1097 Alexios made the leaders of the First Crusade swear upon the relic that they would cede to Byzantium the cities and strongholds that they took in the East. And seven years later he presented a large fragment to the Transfiguration monastery on Mount Sgumata in Boeotia,¹⁶⁶ a gift that may signal recognition of the region's renewed significance for the imperial fisc. No matter the manner in which the emperor obtained his piece of the precious wood, from the standpoint of economic anthropology such distributions represent "kingly monopolies," in effect little different from the exclusivity that attached at various times to goods such as salt, gold, and barley.¹⁶⁷ Yet it is much harder to plot the demand for relics and therefore more difficult to insert them into the struggle for commodities waged, according to one analysis, between, on the one hand, political élites that tended to be the guardians of restricted exchange and sumptuary barriers and, on the other, merchants who championed "free trade" and an unfettered equivalence with money. What is clear is that relics had emblematic as much as economic value. In a sense undreamt of by the anthropologist who applied the term generally to luxury goods, they were "incarnated signs."¹⁶⁸

What we know of the circulation of relics does not upset Grierson's view that gifts and loot were prime forms of transfer in the early Middle Ages.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, the commutability of these categories and, by extension, their effective equivalence with objects of the trade in luxuries leaps from the sources, both Greek and Muslim, that devote much more space to plunder than they do to presents. Theophanes notes, for instance, the "great quantities of aloes and big pieces of aloes wood, each weighing over 70 or 80 lbs., much silk and pepper, more linen shirts than one could count, sugar, ginger, . . . silver, silken garments, woolen rugs, and woven carpets" seized by Herakleios' troops at the royal

¹⁶⁴Notably in the work of J. Baudrillard, *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe* (Paris, 1972), trans. C. Levin, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (St. Louis, Mo., 1981). From the point of view of economic anthropology, a roughly analogous argument was offered by C. A. Gregory, *Gifts and Commodities* (London-New York, 1982) who, however, also recognized the transformation of gifts into commodities.

¹⁶⁵See Geary, "Sacred Commodities" and esp. Schwineköper, "Christus-Reliquien-Verehrung" (both as above, note 23).

¹⁶⁶E. Voordeckers and L. Milis, "La Croix byzantine d'Eine," *Byzantion* 39 (1969): 456–88, which focuses on Alexios' gift to his daughter Maria of a particle of the cross now encased in a triptych at the collegial church of Eine in Flanders. For the growing importance of Boeotia, see A. Harvey, "Economic Expansion in Central Greece in the Eleventh Century," *BMGS* 8 (1982–83): 21–28. For other gifts offered on this occasion and the sources, see 249 and notes 21 and 22 above.

¹⁶⁷Appadurai, "Introduction," in *The Social Life of Things* (as above, note 23), 33.

¹⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁶⁹"Commerce in the Dark Ages" (as above, note 30). For the exceptions that prove the rule, see Geary, "Sacred Commodities," 184–86.

treasury of Dastagerd in 628.¹⁷⁰ On the Muslim side Nizām al-Mulk records the valuables stored at the Ka'ba when the Shiite rebel Abū Tāhir attempted to destroy it (A.H. 317/A.D. 929–930): “It was impossible to estimate the amount of gold, dirams, dinars, fine linen, musk, aloes-wood, ambergris and other precious things which they took.”¹⁷¹ Accustomed by now to hyperbole of this sort, the reader still cannot fail to notice the extent to which these goods coincide with the most prestigious items of Mediterranean commerce. The mechanisms of trade, loot, and gift-giving differed, but these passages, as well as many cited above, suggest that all three categories were forms of that exchange which, if one agrees with Simmel,¹⁷² is the source, not the consequence, of the value placed upon things.

The roles that I have attributed to gifts tend to confirm this transference of economic responsibility from the things themselves to the fact of their circulation. Like goods in trade, gifts functioned as incentives to further consumption and thereby provoked production. They served a variety of ends—social, political, and ideological—and were therefore means to the attainment of objectives rather than objectives in themselves.¹⁷³ Moreover, to reach these ends, the Greek and Muslim subjects of this study, like merchants, made rational calculations, including the selection of recipients, the value of the gifts sent, some anticipation as to the benefits that would accrue from this behavior, and even the decision to move things in and out of commerce.¹⁷⁴ Donors chose to send one good rather than another, recipients to evaluate and then to consume it, to keep it for purposes of display, or to transfer it to a third party. In a word, they economized.

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¹⁷⁰*Chronographia* (as above, note 28) 1:322, lines 1–8, trans. Mango and Scott, 451. Theophanes goes on to add that the Romans burned all these goods “on account of their weight” (διὰ τὸ βάρος).

¹⁷¹Siyar al-Mulūk, trans. H. Dale as *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings* (New Haven, Conn., 1960), 235.

¹⁷²271, above.

¹⁷³The distinction is clearly drawn by M. Douglas and B. Isherwood, *The World of Goods* (New York, 1979), 71.

¹⁷⁴On this phenomenon in a broader context, see I. Kopytoff, “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process” in *The Social Life of Things* (as in note 23), 64–91.